

IDEAL BOOK

for
GIRLS

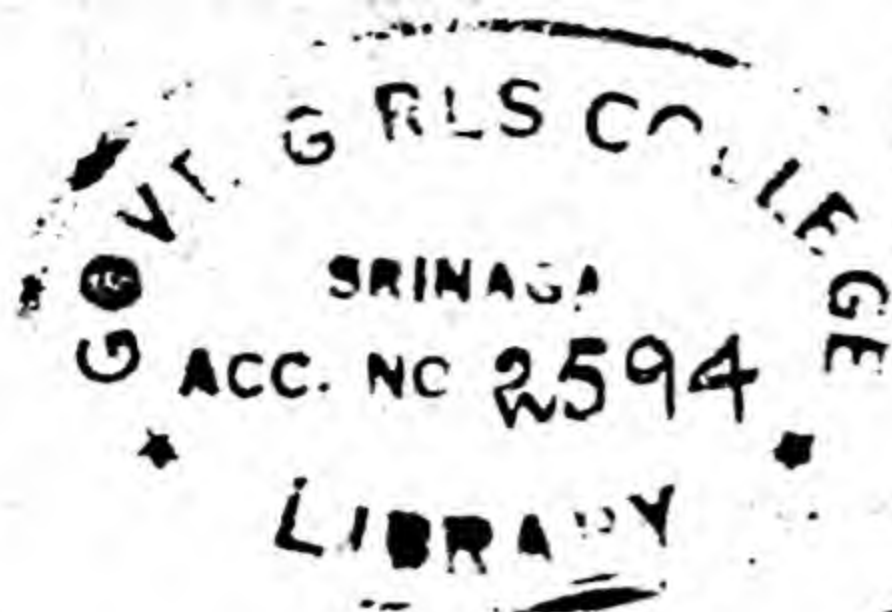
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THE RIVER ROVERS

By LEONORA FRY

"WE'VE had a grand week, with weather to match so I hope this last afternoon and evening will be in keeping with the rest," Rita said, as she lay back against the boat's comfortable cushions.

"I must say I'm rather doubtful about the prospect, though."

"So am I," put in Mary, her eldest sister, who was surveying the sky with her most weather-wise air. "I don't quite like the look of those woolly clouds over there. Even if we don't have rain by and by, the light is going to be tricky presently, so I think I had better try and get that last study as soon as possible."

"Suppose we stay here for the night instead of going farther?" suggested Pat. "This backwater seems (as good a base as any.)"

Mary nodded. "I was just thinking that, too. And you see that marshy, willowy ground away in the distance there, with the little stream snaking through it? Yes? Well, I think that's the very place for me to get what I want. Hand me my traps, girls. I'll start right away. Mind

you leave some tea for me when I come back. Squatting in a tree for hours on end always makes me ravenous."

"Need you tell us that?" chorused her juniors in good-natured scorn, Pat adding: "See that you *do* come back. No falling out of said tree or getting stuck in the bog!"

Mary's answering laughter floated back to them, then, with a wave of the hand, she disappeared round a bend in the river path.

It certainly had been a grand week for all three sisters. To Rita and Pat, it had been pure holiday, a fitting climax before the beginning of term. Mary also regarded the river tour as a vacation, but one with a purpose, for she had been making a number of camera studies of water fowl. These studies were to accompany a book just completed by her husband who was a well-known writer on such subjects.

The job of collecting these illustrations was one precisely after Mary's heart, since she had once been a professional photographer, and delighted in the work. So, in the greatest content, she had hired a boat which could be equipped with a canvas roof, and with this, plus a tent and some camping gear, she and her sisters had embarked on the wide water of the River Mander.

Revelling in the mellow September heat, they had travelled a few miles each day, and then fixed on a camping site, and from these bases, Mary had sought her quests. The younger girls meanwhile had diverted themselves in their own fashion. They could see no fun in 'perching in trees till the crack o' doom, or lying under a bank trying to look like two leaves and a twig,' as Pat put it. But they found all the enjoyment they wanted in exploring, sight-seeing or—just lazing.

"I don't know about you, but I feel energetic this afternoon," Pat said, when they had washed up the crockery used at lunch. "How would it be if we cruised up river; on foot, I mean? That path that goes winding through the trees rather intrigues me."

"Same here," was the brisk response. "I could do with a bit of leg stretching and this is such a quiet spot that I think we can safely leave

the boat for an hour or so, without risk of anyone meddling with it. It's so well surrounded by rushes and the bushes on the bank, that anyone would need to be almost on top of it, to see it at all."

Therefore, it was with minds justifiably at ease that the pair strolled along the meadow which hemmed in this tranquil water.

The bank of the main stream was well treed and a narrow path wound its way from clump to clump, pursuing a course even more twisting than that of the river. It was, as Pat had suggested, a pleasantly tantalising path, its curves seeming to promise that sooner or later, some exciting prospect would be revealed; so both girls were conscious of quite a shock of disappointment when, on coming round one of its more acute angles, they found themselves barred by a high stake fence.

There was no denying the finality of this obstacle, for the fence stretched right down to the water's edge, while, on the landward side, it appeared to bore away into limitless distance. All that the explorers could do was to peep through the gaps between the stakes, which later were conveniently placed for such a purpose, being a good inch apart.

The view beyond was not wholly unrewarding. Nearest at hand was a belt of trees and shrubs which followed the line of the fence. These were not thickly ranked, however, so the well-kept grounds that spread out beyond showed invitingly, as did glimpses of a long, grey stone house which lay some way back from the river. It was this half seen building that held the interested eyes of the strangers.

"Huge place, isn't it?" Rita murmured. "Quite one of 'the stately homes' etc. But I wonder which?"

"Formerly Riverdale House, now Riverdale School, but at the moment just a monster pod with four little peas rattling inside," came a cool drawling voice from somewhere overhead.

Pat and Rita were so startled that they quite literally jumped; but their curious glances soon spied out the owner of the voice, who was saucily eyeing them from the far side of the spiky barricade.

She was sitting on a branch of a tall tree, having from this vantage

point a clear view of the path's abrupt end. They judged her to be about Pat's age, which was fifteen and, looking up at her, they were at once struck by the extraordinary charm of her dimpled face, which was set off by a pair of violet blue eyes and crowned by a head of crisply curling dark hair.

Plainly delighted by their responsive smiles, the girl wriggled a little farther along the tree branch in order to look over more easily.

"Are you on holiday?" she inquired with frank interest.

Pat nodded. "Just at the end of it, as a matter of fact," she explained. "We go back to school the day after to-morrow. Meanwhile, we're on a kind of river rove with our eldest sister. Just exploring and camping and moving from place to place as the fit takes us."

"That sounds rather fun. My holiday has been much more ordinary, though I enjoyed every minute of it. I always stay with relatives as I'm an orphan and haven't a home of my own. This time, unluckily, I had to come back a week ahead of the opening of term, as by chance it wasn't convenient for any of my people to have me for the last day or two. The Head returns from her own holiday to-morrow, but until her arrival there I am in the vast space of Riverdale School, with only the housekeeper and two maids for company. The rest of the staff is still on holiday."

"It sounds rather a grim prospect," sympathised Rita. "Haven't you any friends in the neighbourhood?"

"One family, living a few miles away," the tree rooster explained. "I cycled over to see them before lunch, but, like a duffer, I chanced going on the hop, instead of letting them know I was coming, so got what I deserved by finding they were out for the day. I had lunch in the town, then back I trundled, to find that Mrs. Gibbons was having an afternoon out as well. Evidently she had given the maids leave to go out, or they had given it to themselves! Anyway, there wasn't a soul in the house, and all at once I absolutely got the creeps to think I was the only one in that huge building, so I scooted out of doors as though demons were after me."

"I don't wonder a bit," Pat said, peering anew at the long façade of Riverdale. "I'd have been expecting something to pop out at me from somewhere at any moment. Isn't it a rather shivery sort of house at the best of times?"

The hearer laughed. "No, not really; especially when it's full up with schoolgirls. It was simply the solitude that got me this afternoon. With my hand on my heart, I can assure you that Riverdale is a lovely place to be in; it's years and years old, of course, and really beautiful. Look here, there's not much sense in just telling you about it; the best thing would be to show it, and I'd love to do that; and I'm quite at liberty to have a friend or two in, as I'm allowed to treat it as a home till term starts. Do come in and have tea with me."

"Thanks awfully; we shall love to," beamed Pat, Rita putting in: "It's frightfully nice of you."

The hostess grinned. "No, it isn't," she retorted. "I'm dying for company, and you're exactly the kind I like. When I came out of the house I tried to tack myself on to the two gardeners, but they're really much too busy and important to have anything to do with a mere school-girl. You see, I was high and dry. You're really conferring a favour, so don't thank me. Now, if you'll follow the fence for a little way, you'll come to a gate, where I'll let you in," with which the vivacious speaker edged back to the tree trunk and scrambled to the ground.

Two minutes later Pat and Rita found themselves inside the Riverdale precincts and their new acquaintance, who by now had introduced herself as Rosamund Manners, was rebolting the high gate of the entrance.

Stepping out of the tree and shrub border, the newcomers had their first clear view of the house. It was long, three storied, and from either end a short wing jutted. For the most part the many windows were of generous size, but right upon the top story, and seeming to lie very close beneath the graceful balustrade that girdled the roof, there was a row of narrow apertures, hinting that dim attics lurked behind them. On the

floor below, every third window opened on to a narrow balcony; these balconies and the roof balustrade were the only approach to ornamentation, and did nothing to mar the elegant severity of the mansion.

Crossing the lawns, the three girls passed between tennis courts and came to a short flight of shallow steps that took them up to the paved and balustraded terrace bordering the house. For a moment their light footsteps rang on the paving stones, then a doorway of the building received them.

Pat and Rita were not long in discovering that the inside of Riverdale was no less impressive than the outside. Under Rosamund's enthusiastic guidance they strolled from room to room, admiring as they went. The very equipment was, on the whole, harmonious, for the furnisher, someone obviously possessed of taste and vision, had managed to strike a nice balance between art and that practicality indispensable to school purposes. Even where the school flavour was, of necessity, uppermost, it failed to blot out the true elegance of the interior, since this was a matter of structure and proportion.

"Well, you've seen all the main part of the house," Rosamund said at last. "Now I'm going to show you something that's different, but quite as interesting in its way, so follow me."

She led her guests along a corridor, passing spacious bedrooms, many of which had been converted into dormitories. Halting before one door, she opened it to reveal a steep narrow staircase very different from the stately one which curved up to the floor from the hall.

With an eagerness not unlike that of a rabbit popping into its burrow, Rosamund plunged through the doorway, Pat and Rita following close on her track as she climbed the stairs. When they reached the top of the flight, they seemed to have entered another region, remote from the high-ceilinged, light story below. Here, all was curiously still and shadowy, for the passage into which they stepped ran the length of the house and was itself lit only by a small window at each extremity. It was true that the doors of some of the rooms on either side of it were standing open,

but little extra light filtered in on this account, these windows being no larger than their passage counterparts.

The rooms themselves were full of a rather eerie fascination, for the light—small in quantity dulled by growing clouds—yet shone in brightly enough to display a wonderful variety of furnishing.

Somehow, both Pat and Rita had expected to be confronted on all sides with a typical attic medley; boxes, bundles, trunks, perhaps, as well as odds and ends of unwanted furniture. Instead, order reigned unchallenged and it was plain that the varied contents of the rooms had been carefully, even lovingly disposed, so that full justice might be done to the beauty of hangings of old tapestry, to richly hued rugs and to the subdued sheen that showed from the surface of many a piece of ancient furniture.

"All these things belong to the Head," Rosamund explained, as they wandered from room to room. "She inherited them from her father, who was a keen collector. He died a year or two ago, and when the things were brought here she decided that as the rest of the house had to be furnished on business-like lines, it would be a good idea to keep the collection together up here as a sort of show-piece. Most of the girls look on it as a rather super museum-cum-old-curiosity shop. It is quite fascinating, isn't it?"

"I should think it is," Rita concurred, looking from an old sampler that she had been examining. "I wish we had a haunt like this at our school."

Pat was standing a pace or two apart during this exchange. She had been gazing round her in a slightly abstracted manner, as though endeavouring to capture some elusive recollection. Now she spun round on one heel and confronted her companions.

"Doesn't it strike you as being marvellously 'Jane-Eyre-ish'?" she demanded. "I was trying to think what it reminded me of and now I've got it. This is exactly like the description of the top story of 'Thornfield,' with its long, dark passages and its little low rooms all hung with

tapestry work and full of old furniture. I almost expect to see Grace Poole glide past the door, or to hear the awful laughter of the mad woman who was hidden there."

"Why, that's absolutely it!" exclaimed Rosamund and Rita in a breath, the former adding: "What a lovely idea! I wish I'd thought of it. I was always crazy over that book, too."

Impressed by Pat's apt comparison, they were silent for a moment or two. The more they considered it, the more completely 'Thornfield' did the upper floor become; indeed, as certain of the more spine-chilling episodes of that immortal Bronte story returned to their minds, the girls began to think that the likeness was almost too clear, especially as the sullen sky shed a light that was, in these rooms, peculiar, even eerie.

"Look here, it's almost time we had tea," Rosamund said, arousing herself with a slight effort. "Let's just have a peep into the other rooms, then we'll go down."

As talk and movement were renewed, the slight spell was broken, the three girls feeling a return to matter of fact normality.

"I really felt quite shuddery for a second or two," Rita confessed as they stepped towards the doorway.

Pat gave a teasing laugh. "I believe you imagined you were Jane when at dead of night she was left alone to look after the stabbed man, while sinister bumps and unexplainable sounds came from the adjoining room."

"Now then, don't start us off again," retorted Rita. "Up here it's easy enough to imagine anything—— Oh! what was that?"

Neither Rosamund nor Pat had a guess to offer, each being as dumb-founded as the speaker. Looking out from faces that had paled more than a shade, three pairs of eyes met in mute inquiry. Finding no help in one another's depths, they turned once more to the murky passage, from some room at the farther end of which had come that sudden creaking sliding sound and the dull thud that had concluded it.

No other noise had followed these and into the heavy silence came Rosamund's voice, a trifle breathless yet somehow determined.

"I suppose we might as well solve the problem, if we can screw ourselves up to it. I feel creepy but curious. Who's coming with me?"

"We are!" Rita stoutly averred.

Pat's vigorous nod confirmed this declaration. "I expect there's a perfectly simple explanation of the noise," she said airily. "Probably caused by the wind or something."

This was a good attempt at unconcern but nothing more, for, as each girl was all too well aware, no wind or even breeze was stirring.

"Left hand side, I should think, and either the end room or the one next to it," Rosamund murmured. "But we'll look in all the doorways as we go."

With more doggedness than alacrity the trio began its inspection, proceeding in zigzag fashion, in order to view the rooms on each side of the corridor.

But although they stared keenly round each interior, no untoward sight



greeted them, nor was there anything that suggested an explanation of the noise that had startled them. Even the last room to be explored seemed quiet and unstirred, with its uniform soft light, its hangings and its simple furnishing of rush-seated chairs, gate-legged table and the large and ancient oak chest.

Completely bewildered, the girls stood looking round.

"Well, it's certainly very odd," Rosamund pronounced in a hushed voice. "Not a thing to explain those sounds. If I'd been alone I'd have thought I must have dreamed them, but we can't *all* have been having 'daymare'."

"There's something almost uncanny about it, I think," Pat ventured, looking about her rather uneasily.

Rita threw her a sharp glance. "So you feel that as well, do you? I told you not to conjure up 'Thornfield' too graphically!"

Rosamund gave a sudden shiver. "To be quite honest, I don't like this very much," she remarked. "I vote we clear off downstairs and get our tea."

"Grand idea!" applauded Pat, and with obvious relief she followed the others from the room.

In traversing the passage the three lost no time, for half-way down it they quickened their pace. Even this acceleration seemed too little, however, for, becoming possessed by an infectious panic, they burst into a run and were soon clattering down the first stairs as though pursued by some nameless horror. When they had whisked through the doorway at the bottom, Rosamund banged the door behind them and turned the key in the lock.

They had to linger a minute to regain breath and now that they were down in the lighter, more ordinary-looking second floor, they began to feel that there had been something exaggerated in their terror.

"I suppose we're really three mugs," murmured Rosamund as they exchanged rather sheepish grins. "Still, I'm glad we're down here, all the same! And do you know, I believe Mrs. Gibbons has come back.

I can hear cheerful clattering from the kitchen that suggests tea preparations. By the way, I propose we don't say anything about the noises and our headlong scoot; she would probably think us quite mad."

"I expect she's frightfully practical and matter of fact herself, eh?" queried Pat.

"Rather!" agreed Rosamund. "That reminds me, too, I might as well take down the key. Mrs. Gibbons always locks this door at night and puts away the key somewhere in the Head's room," saying which the speaker drew out the article in question and slipped it in her jacket pocket.

The girls found that nervous imagining soon died in the presence of good-natured and forthright Mrs. Gibbons, and by the time they had gaily partaken of the liberal tea she provided, the darker side of their recent experience was still further dispelled. Puzzled they remained, but with a sensation that was more pleasant than alarming.

"We've had a heavenly afternoon, Rosamund," Pat said at last. "I wish we hadn't to part company yet, but it's about time Rita and I toddled. If Mary gets back first, she'll wonder where on earth we are."

"I'd like you to meet Mary," Rita said, looking at their hostess.

"Couldn't we arrange to meet for coffee in the town to-morrow morning? We pass through it on our way home."

"We'll call that a date then," assented Rosamund. "But couldn't I meet Mary to-day? I was thinking that I would like to walk back with you to the boat if you didn't mind."

"*Mind*, indeed!" laughed Pat in a tone that eloquently answered Rosamund's question, and in a few moments the three set out together, and after a brisk walk they reached the camping place about ten minutes ahead of Mary, who returned in triumph to report a successful afternoon.

It was a jovial party that chatted by the waterside, and Rosamund enjoyed herself so much that she was in no hurry to depart. A dull pattering among the bush leaves was the first things that reminded her of her distance from Riverdale.

"Goodness! we're going to have that deluge at last. I must fly or I'll get drenched on the way home," she exclaimed, scrambling up, and with a "Goodbye, girls! See you in town at ten to-morrow!" she hurried off and was soon flitting along the path that bordered the main stream.

The three campers were speedily forced to the conclusion that, for all her haste, Rosamund certainly would be well and truly soaked long before she reached the school, for barely five minutes after her departure the lazy pattering quickened to a pelt, gradually increasing until rain was washing down in torrents.

"Perhaps she'll come back to shelter for a bit," hazarded Rita, but as time passed it became evident that Rosamund had kept on her way. However, they were to see her again before night.

It was about eight o'clock when the sisters, sheltering under their canvas roof, heard a hail that made them turn out to investigate. On the bank stood their new friend, garbed in mackintosh and hood.

"I've come to ask you to Riverdale for the night," she cried. "Mrs. Gibbons is in a fearful flap about you. Roofed your boat *may* be, she says, but still the only suitable place in which to sleep on a night like this, is a house. Do come! you can moor the boat off the Riverdale grounds."

.

Some passing sound, perhaps, or possibly the events of a more than usually vivid nightmare, jerked Pat from sleep round about one in the morning.

The evening's storm had passed, although the sky was still strewn with ragged clouds. There were even transient gleams of moonlight, and by one of them Pat noted unfamiliar things about her and for a second wondered where on earth she could be. Recollection swept back; of course, she was at Riverdale.

With a sigh of ease, she turned in her comfortable bed and had just closed her eyes to woo fresh slumber, when some obscure but urgent instinct caused her to open them once more and cast another glance towards the window.

If ever Pat's blood ran chill with horror, it did then. So staggered was she by what she saw, that she blinked quickly once or twice to see if she was asleep. But no! she was far enough from it and there really was a strange elongated apparition there on the balcony outside, seeming to sway itself from side to side in a weird and restless manner.

Just seen by the uncertain light, it looked unbearably ghostly. Rapt in appalled fascination, Pat was unable to wrench her gaze away, just as she was unable to move her rigid limbs.

Should she scream? No, she felt too petrified even to do that, for it seemed to her that she might easily be pounced upon by something before her cries could awaken others and bring assistance. True, her sisters were in rooms on each side of her and Rosamund was only just across the corridor, but the walls and doors of Riverdale were thick—not meant for sound to penetrate too easily.

Thought raced madly in Pat's brain. She *must* do something to break the spell of fear upon her! Calling up all her self-control, she was just about to make one frantic spring from bed and dash for the door, when something else made her gasp and remain quite still. For the swinging thing resolved itself into a means by which a man had come slithering down on to the little balcony outside her window. A moment or two later, he was inside and moving noiselessly across the room, and almost before Pat could believe her eyes, her door was whipped open, closed again and she was alone with the dangling 'ghost'.

It no longer held terrors for her, however. If a flesh and blood man could grasp it, so could she! Out of bed in an instant, she just took time to dart to the window before rousing the house, to help solve the further mystery.

A long piece of tapestry! And suspended to make a rope from a window above! A window on the attic floor! In a flash Pat remembered all the treasures on that floor; remembered, too, the unaccountable noises which had interrupted that interesting afternoon's prowling; then she dashed for her door!

If the others in the house thought her a victim of nightmare, they were soon divested of that idea.

"Well, we'll certainly search the house, my dear," Mrs. Gibbons said soothingly to Pat upon hearing the story, "but——" her expression here spoke a volume of doubt.

The first thing to justify Pat was a state of things on the attic floor, where confusion reigned among the treasures; and in the old oak chest, the lid of which now lay flung open, some old-time garments lay in a crumpled state that told its own tale.

"A burglar! He must have heard us and hidden in the chest," cried Rosamund. "No wonder we had the creeps; the noises we heard were *his!*"

"Downstairs quickly, then!" gasped Mrs. Gibbons. "We must telephone the police. Oh, I do hope he hasn't got away with much."

But as it happened, the burglar hadn't even got himself away, much less the great tapestry bundle of loot which he had first of all flung to the ground from the window before finding himself baulked of escape by the door Rosamund had locked, he had thought of a way out through a lower floor room.

Rosamund, leading a rush downstairs, for the second time within those few hours, suddenly pulled up with a cry and the others, pressing close on her heels, soon saw that she was shining her torchlight on a figure that lay face downwards in the hall, knocked senseless, as they all saw in a flash, by a fall in the dark against a heavy suit of armour.

"Well, we won't forget your visit to Riverdale in a hurry," Rosamund said to the girls over breakfast. "I'm sure the Head will want to see you all, so I shall suggest that she invites you all here for your next summer holidays. Then perhaps we can do river roving together. Wouldn't it be great?"

And Mary, too, joined in the enthusiastic chorus from Rita and Pat.

A TEST FOR 'PRIMROSE'

By BERYL C. LAWLEY

ROSEMARY Minter threw open the casement window and, balancing herself precariously on the sill, called softly to her sister. Terry, younger by a year and always eager to follow Rosemary, dropped the trowel with which she was battling with weeds in the rosebed, and sauntered towards the bungalow. The elder girl's grey eyes were shining with excitement, and impatiently she swept back a loose strand of waving dark brown hair.

"I'm dying to tell you!" she burst out impetuously. "What do you think? Alan has just heard from John Wellfield and he—John I mean—may have to go to Scotland to-morrow on important business for his firm."

"But the Regatta!" gasped Terry blankly. "The dinghy race means so much to Alan. If John can't partner him——" she broke off in consternation.

"Alan says I can take John's place, and will do just as well," Rosemary announced proudly. "After all, I'm seventeen and have sailed in *Primrose* heaps of times. I shan't lose my head just because it's a race."

Terry's blue eyes looked admiringly at her sister's well-built, athletic form, and the quick smile that so frequently lit up her small elfin face showed itself for an instant. "Wish I were like you," she sighed. "I'd be quaking with nervousness although I'd love to take part in the Regatta to-morrow."

"Time you got over those feelings," Rosemary remarked, idly playing with the bird-patterned curtains and swinging her long legs. "You and I will enter for a race together some day. You could do jolly well if you'd forget yourself and give your whole attention to *Primrose*."

Terry, shaking her auburn curls, smiled rather sadly. Before she could speak the garden gate opened and Alan Minter came striding up the path.

"Everything ready for to-morrow?" Rosemary asked eagerly.

Her brother's clearly-cut features, so like her own, were wearing a worried expression. On reaching his sister he plunged both hands deeply into the pockets of his grey flannel trousers and stubbed a loose stone in the path with a well-worn brogue.

"*Primrose's* boom is faulty," he informed them gloomily. "Still, I must go up to Town this afternoon on business and stay the night so John and I—if he comes—can bring a fresh one in the morning. I can't get it replaced locally, I've just tried."

"What a pest!" Rosemary ejaculated. "Just when you particularly wanted all to be O.K."

"Yes, this race may mean everything to me," Alan admitted. "I know the improvements in dinghy fitting that I've invented and put on *Primrose* are good, but boat manufacturers won't look at them unless they prove themselves superior to existing gadgets. But if *Primrose* wins the dinghy race to-morrow, a well-known firm has promised to take up my inventions and put them on the market. It would give me a flying start to be pushed by Colton and Bloomfield."

"You must win!" Rosemary decreed firmly, and in spite of his three years seniority, her brother listened attentively while she asked his plans for the morning.

"I'll be down in heaps of time to fit the boom," he assured her. "The race isn't until two o'clock, and there's a train due here at ten and another at twelve thirty."

"Leave me John's phone number," Rosemary reminded him. "Just in case of accidents."

"He isn't on the phone. Awfully inconvenient, I can't think how he manages. Here's the address." Alan fished a card out of his blazer pocket.

"Better than nothing," his sister declared. "And if John can't come at the last minute don't worry. I'll be absolutely ready to take his place, and I know the course and racing rules by heart."

"And wouldn't you love the chance!" laughed Alan. "Never mind, I'll see you have one at the next Regatta. You might enter for the Ladies Race. Good practice."

"You never know your luck!" Rosemary slid the words out softly, and jumped lightly to the floor. "Phew, it's hot! But the wind's creeping up. Shouldn't wonder if there's a stiffish breeze by to-morrow."

"Stiffer than we'll want, I'm thinking," Alan returned, staring seawards. "Time to go and pack my bag."

"Coming down to the boathouse?" Rosemary called to her sister. "I'd like a last look over *Primrose* in case I'm wanted to-morrow."

Terry eagerly agreed and taking the key from its hook in the hall the girls sauntered along the winding road that led to the harbour. The sleepy little town of Seafeld, nestling under encircling hills, was unusually gay with flags and bunting, so as to be ready for its great week of the year. The last part of the way was over shining cobblestones and Terry, wincing in light sandals, was glad to reach the row of white-painted boathouses at the edge of the jetty. Rosemary, shod in serviceable brogues, was indifferent to the hard ground, and stopping in front of the first 'lock-up' inserted the key and swung open the door.

"Isn't she a beauty!" she exclaimed admiringly.

Primrose's silver spruce, mahogany trimmed hull stretched gracefully before them. Fourteen feet in length and carrying a hundred and twenty eight square feet of now tightly-furled sail aboard, she looked every inch a racer. Rosemary patted her affectionately.

"If she's properly handled she won't let Alan down," Terry vowed. "But it's a nuisance about the boom. Do you know the plan of the course and all the rules for certain?"

"It's a class race which means that all the entrants will be approximately the same size," Rosemary answered. "As for the course, it's the

usual oval shape of Seafield's competitions and the dinghies have to keep outside the flagged buoys."

Terry nodded. "Two preliminary warnings and a flying start," she added. "I know that much. Heard Alan saying so yesterday. Any idea how many entries?"

"Eight or nine but funnily enough nobody is in that we know at all well. Now just let me check up."



Terry watched silently while her sister made a thorough examination. Presently Rosemary straightened herself and announced that she had finished.

"Time we thought about supper," she decided. "Hullo, it's beginning to rain."

Big splashes were falling and the girls hurried back to the bungalow. Alan had already departed to London and during the evening the weather grew worse and worse.

"It's a positive gale already," said Rosemary uneasily, as she swept the rummy cards together and prepared to lock up for the night.

"The sea's running high too," sighed Terry, peeping through the drawn curtains. "Unusual for September. Just our luck."

As they lay in bed listening both girls grew more and more depressed. However, finally they fell asleep and woke to brilliant sunshine and a howling wind.

Jumping out of bed first, Rosemary ran to the window and gazed at the foam-flecked sea. Quickly Terry joined her and the two looked at each other in consternation.

"With a brand new boom it won't be too bad," the elder girl sighed. "But it's sickening just when Alan wants to show off *Primrose's* paces. Such a lot hangs on this race."

"If *Primrose* does well to-day I should think it would absolutely prove that Alan's inventions are O.K.," Terry declared. "Just listen to the gale!"

Breakfast was eaten in silence, neither sister feeling in the mood to chatter. As they were finishing the crisply-fried bacon, which was followed by toast and marmalade, the phone bell rang.

"Hullo, yes this is Seafeld eight three two," Rosemary had snatched up the receiver. "Who? Good morning, Mr. Grant." She listened attentively.

"What's the matter?" Terry demanded, as her sister rang off and stared dejectedly at the breakfast table. "Anything wrong?"

"The Regatta Secretary has been speaking," said Rosemary slowly. "The Committee has decided that it is too rough to race from Seafeld Harbour, and all the events will be held at Dowbay."

"That's only ten miles away," remarked Terry.

"Yes, but I daren't risk sailing *Primrose* with that shaky boom, it might snap half-way. And if Alan comes down by the later train there won't be time to fit it and sail round."

"Send him a wire," Terry suggested.

"When he gets it the earlier train will have started. But wait a minute while I look at the timetable," said Rosemary, and finally announced that a train was due at Dowbay from Town at twelve fifty five. "We'll have to trail *Primrose* to Dowbay behind the Austin," she decided. "Terry, will you go down to the Post Office and wire Alan to meet us there and fix the new boom? While you're gone I'll get out the boat trailer, hitch it to the car and nail a note to the door to say what has happened."

With Rosemary's assistance, Terry wrote out the telegram and then set off on her errand. Going to the garage, built at one side of the bungalow, Rosemary ran the Austin Twelve forward and then turned to the trailer. This consisted of a triangular chassis on two wheels whose apex fastened to the back of the car, and whose keel plank at the after end was furnished with a rubber-covered wooden roller which helped in the loading of the dinghy.

By the time the trailer was securely hitched Terry had returned, and the girls ran into the bungalow to cut some sandwiches and change their clothes. Rosemary was wearing navy slacks with a Cambridge blue shirt and sweater, while the younger girl put on white linen shorts topped by an almond green shirt and darker pullover. Both bound gaily-patterned handkerchiefs round their heads, locked up the bungalow, tumbled into the car and with Rosemary at the wheel headed for the boathouse.

Arriving at the harbour, the elder girl expertly backed the Austin towards the doors that Terry was swinging open. *Primrose* was always placed in readiness for any necessary trailing, and soon she was safely in position with the padded beams which crossed the gunwales bolted to the frame. Carefully Rosemary drew away from the boathouse, waited while her sister locked up, and then the pair turned sharp left along the winding second-class road that led to Dowbay.

"Wonder if Alan's had the wire?" Tony speculated.

"Hardly. I only hope he wasn't catching the earlier train. If he has he'll read the note and come on by bus. Still, there'd be plenty of time."

There was very little traffic on the road for all the other boats were being sailed to Dowbay. Now that the decision to alter the place of the Regatta had been taken, the wind had dropped considerably and the sea was less choppy.

"I do hope John can't come!" Terry burst out impetuously. "I know you must be dying to be in the race and, after all, you're having the trouble. Why should he step in at the last minute and take the credit?"

"Girl alive, because he's experienced in racing and I'm not!" laughed Rosemary. "But I could help Alan a lot, all the same. Of course, in either case he'll take the helm. He has a much lighter touch than John."

At this point they reached the top of a long, gradual ascent, and prepared to go down the short, steep descent on the other side. Gently Rosemary applied the brakes and then, out of regard for the trailer, changed into third gear. Suddenly there was a crash from behind. The trailer's automatic brakes had failed to function and it had overrun the Austin.

"Goodness!" Terry gasped, just saving herself from shooting head-first through the open windscreen.

Rosemary, with the steering wheel in her chest, brought the car to a standstill. Opening the driving door she jumped into the road and inspected the damage. Fortunately, excepting for a deeper dent where one had been before, it was slight. She immediately began to look for the cause of the trouble.

"It's the double spring-loading," she announced at last. "I'll have to try to put it right. What's the time, Terry?"

"Eleven o'clock. Want any help?"

"Give me the tool bag, then I think I can manage."

Rosemary wrestled silently but it was midday before the trouble was remedied. Several passing motorists volunteered assistance, but none of them had any knowledge of the peculiarities of trailers. However, at last all was in order and the girls, rather hot and grimy, continued on their journey.

"Luckily our clothes aren't messed," said Rosemary. "We'll have a wash and some lemonade at a café I know of, and then we'll be as good as new?"

"What about the sandwiches?" Terry asked.

"When we've cleaned ourselves we'll bring the drinks to the car and have a picnic lunch. Only we must hurry. I want to meet the twelve-fifty-five train."

"Where will Alan fit the boom?"

"There's a nice quiet spot not a hundred yards from the harbour. We'll fetch him, and maybe John, and drive straight to it."

The first part of the plan went without a hitch and the girls reached the station as the London train was signalled. But of their brother or his friend there was no sign. A steady stream of passengers filed out into the hot sunshine but not Alan or John.

"Shall we try the bus stop?" Terry suggested.

"I suppose we'd better. If they caught the earlier train to Seafeld they should have found the note and taken the eleven o'clock bus."

But the latter had arrived and there were no boys. The conductor, who knew Alan, was positive that he had not been on it.

"Very few locals, Miss," he informed Rosemary. "Crowd of trippers and a dozen children on an outing. I'd have noticed Mr. Minter at once."

"Thanks very much," replied Rosemary blankly. She turned to her sister. "What's to do?" she grimaced. "No hope of Alan turning up in time now. He can't have found my note or else the wire never reached him."

"Phone the bungalow," Terry suggested.

Rosemary, producing two pennies, hurried to the box outside the Post Office but drew another blank. As she rejoined her sister she made up her mind.

"Faulty boom or not I'm launching *Primrose*," she announced. "If neither of the boys turn up you can come with me, Terry."

"But I couldn't!" the younger girl gasped. "At least I'd love to, but I daren't. Supposing I let you down?"

"Rubbish! You'll do far more letting down by not trying. We can but do our best. Come to that the boom may not stand it. But I'm willing to take the risk. We're both good swimmers and there are always motor launches to come to the rescue."

"Can we rig and float *Primrose* by ourselves?"

"I know how to rig and we can get help to launch her from the trailer. Mr. Grant is sure to be here and he will tell me of a fisherman. Only there's no time to lose. It's nearly half-past one already."

The Regatta Secretary was kindness itself and soon found the girls a couple of willing helpers. "Jolly plucky of you!" he declared enthusiastically. "I know how much depends on this race for your brother. You know the rules?"

"Yes," nodded Rosemary. "Alan explained everything just in case John couldn't come."

"You can see the buoys through these glasses. Take a good look they are all numbered. There's the imaginary starting line."

Rosemary, through the powerful Zeiss, could scan the entire course. Even the farthest figures were plainly discernible. Warmly thanking Mr. Grant she hurried away to the launching and rigging of *Primrose*.

"I didn't say anything about the faulty boom," she whispered to Terry. "Seems a bit unsporting to harp on that. Time enough if it breaks."

"Quite agree," assented her sister heartily. "Any sign of the boys?"

"None at all. Now don't think about your nervousness. Concentrate on what this means to Alan."

By the time everything was ready, it was ten minutes to two and the preparatory signal, the flag M, was being hoisted from the yard. Rosemary had decided not to unmoor *Primrose* until the second signal was given, and instructed Terry to stand by the rope in readiness.

"Wish we'd the stop watch," Terry fretted.

"Well we haven't so the only thing to do is to keep one eye on the others and not cut it too fine. Better lose five seconds than have to turn round and start afresh."

Two or three competitors had cast off and were cruising around jockeying for a good position. Rosemary decided that, on the whole, it would pay better to select a spot towards the unpopular side of the starting line and have more sea room. The slight benefit conferred by a small tidal eddy seemed to be scarcely worth the price of a wind disturbed by other craft's sails.

Boom! went the second gun and up went Blue Peter indicating only five minutes to go.

"Cast off!" Rosemary ordered and took the tiller.

Terry, too thrilled to feel nervous, obeyed and her sister set a course on a starboard tack for it was a beat to windward to the starting point. The other seven entrants appeared to be favouring the same half of the line, and were all dallying some hundreds yards away. Rosemary slowed down by easing the sheets and backing her jib. Terry looked on rather anxiously.

"Oughtn't we to move up a bit?" she ventured at last.

"Half a minute," Rosemary responded. "We want to cross the line sailing all out and I daren't risk it yet."

Most of the others were further forward but *Primrose* bided her time. At last Rosemary felt that she could risk it. Letting out sail she set the tiller to port and the dinghy slipped willingly through the water. The imaginary starting line grew closer and closer. For a dreadful moment Rosemary thought they would arrive too soon. One boat had actually crossed and was in the unenviable position of having to wait until everyone else had got away before returning to the line.

"Another second and we'll be penalised as well!" Rosemary thought frantically. "We're practically there."

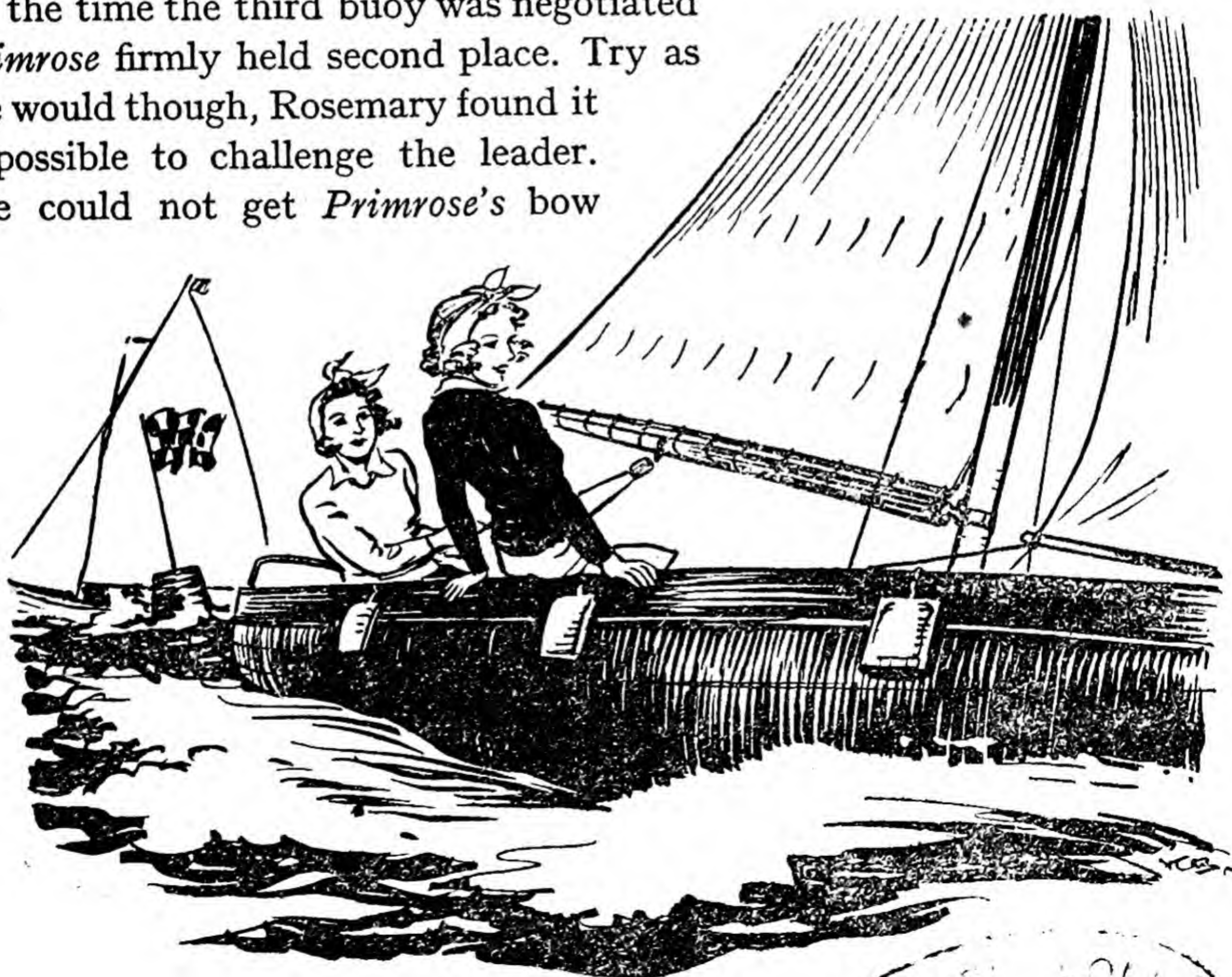
As her heart sank the third gun sounded and Terry turned a laughing face to her sister. "Perfect!" she called cheerily.

Rosemary, too engrossed to give more than a smile of pure relief, settled down to action. The wind, being strong and steady, made it possible to do long tacking. Taking full advantage of this Rosemary

calculated that two turns only need be done before reaching the first buoy. By the time *Primrose* was rounding it the competitors were strung out along the course. Two were ahead of her, one just behind and the other four well to the rear.

"Coming up on weather side," Terry sang out a few minutes later. Rosemary hesitated. Should she luff or let out more sail and hope to shake the fourth dinghy off? She decided on the latter course as it might also enable her to challenge the leaders.

Loosening the mainsail she not only kept her place but by gybing neatly round the second buoy brought *Primrose* appreciably closer to the leaders. Suddenly the first dinghy luffed sharply to try to check her rival. The second boat, thrown out of stride, lost ground and Rosemary drew level. By the time the third buoy was negotiated *Primrose* firmly held second place. Try as she would though, Rosemary found it impossible to challenge the leader. She could not get *Primrose's* bow



to overlap the first boat's stern and so establish an advantage at the final turn.

"She gybes late," Terry called softly, nodding towards the rival. "Could we risk cutting in?"

"I'll try it," Rosemary decided. "But if anything goes wrong we'll be out of the race completely."

At the fourth buoy Rosemary swung the tiller sharply to port. There was just room between the mark and the leader's stern. For a minute the latter's wash threatened to put *Primrose* out of her course, but she now had the windward berth and, shooting ahead, made straight for the finishing buoy.

"Keep it up!" Terry gasped her eyes shining with excitement. "We're almost there. I can see the people waving."

The sea slapped *Primrose's* side as Rosemary let her fully out. The rival dinghy, not allowing herself to be out of the race without an equal effort, surged just astern. Her bow was level with *Primrose's* tiller and Rosemary dared not relax for a moment. All at once there was an ominous creak.

"The boom!" gasped Terry. "It won't stand the strain."

"It must!" Rosemary retorted. The finishing buoy was only a matter of yards away, it would be too cruel if anything went wrong now. Just then a strong gust of wind caught the mainsail. *Primrose* seemed to leap ahead, wash pouring violently from her stern. There was a sharp report and both girls ducked to avoid the swinging ends of the broken boom as their craft, heeling sharply over, passed the winning buoy half a length ahead of the rival dinghy.

Somehow Rosemary managed to get *Primrose* under control, and a pair of shaken but triumphant girls reefed in sail and tried to steer slowly to harbour. Just then a motor boat came tearing towards them, Alan waving madly from the bows.

"Jolly fine show!" he congratulated his sisters, as he came alongside. "Neither John nor I could have made a better finish."

"Will this prove that *Primrose's* new gadgets are worth putting on the market?" Rosemary queried excitedly.

"Absolutely!" her brother responded heartily. "This has been a really gruelling test. Now let me come aboard and take you to harbour. I've a new boom waiting."

"Didn't you receive the telegram?" Terry asked.

"What telegram?"

"Why, we sent one to you before ten this morning. To say that the Regatta had been moved here." Quickly Terry recounted the story with occasional additions from her sister.

"I left before nine to drive John to the station. He received an urgent message this morning and had to catch the Scottish express. When I'd collected the boom afterwards there was not time to go back to his house. Nothing for it but to go straight to my station, leave the car at a garage close by for a man to return, and catch the ten twenty three to Seafeld. The first I knew of the change of plan was on reading your note on the bungalow door. I came along on the next bus, boom and all, but knew I'd be too late for the race. Perhaps it was just as well, I might have lost it!"

"Not likely but, oh, I have enjoyed myself!" Rosemary sighed luxuriously. "I wish I could live every moment of the race again."

"And I," chimed in Terry.

"You'll both have chances to distinguish yourselves in future," laughed Alan. "John will have to stay indefinitely in Scotland. You can partner me in turn in the different trials and races."

"Honestly!" Terry gasped incredulously. "You really mean you'll take me too? Anyway I've quite lost my jitters."

"Of course he means it," Rosemary cried, as *Primrose* drew close to the harbour. "You were the first to notice our rival's wide turns. Why, in a year or so you'll be racing with more confidence than myself."

And as *Primrose* glided to a halt by the side of the steps she laughed across the broken boom to her brother who nodded his head in complete agreement.

THE HOUSE IN THE TREE

By Gwen Thornber

“MOLLY, where are you?”

Her great-aunt's voice penetrated to the top of the giant oak-tree, and Molly uncurled a slim, bare leg, and stretched it towards a lower branch. She hoped Aunt Ellen wouldn't come into the garden and see her descending. She didn't approve of climbing for girls, and thought her great-niece a shameless tomboy.

“Molly!” The french windows of the drawing-room opened, and Aunt Ellen stepped onto the lawn, just as a lithe body dropped from a low branch of the oak-tree and landed lightly on the grass.

“Climbing again, Molly? I think a girl of nearly thirteen should have more dignity. It would be better if you associated with nicely-behaved girls who would set you a good example instead of a wild boy like Peter Cave.”

Molly smoothed down her crumpled dress and surreptitiously straightened her fair, tumbled curls.

“I realise that I do not know many young people to introduce you to,” her Aunt went on a shade less severely, “but that can now be remedied. My friends the Temple-Vaughans have come back from Scotland, and I wish you to take this note inviting them to tea. Christabel Vaughan is a charming girl, about a year older than you, and she will be a most suitable companion for you.”

“All right, Auntie. I'll go and tidy up.” Molly slipped into the house to brush her hair and put on a clean frock, for the Vaughans, Aunt Ellen had told her, were very particular about dress and grooming.

She mounted her bicycle and set off without any great exhilaration at the thought of meeting Christabel Vaughan. The adjective ‘suitable’

condemned her, for used by Aunt Ellen it always meant something prim and dull. 'Suitable books' were the improving sentimental stories of Aunt Ellen's Victorian girlhood, 'suitable occupations' meant knitting or exercising the pekinese, 'suitable dresses' were long-sleeved, long-skirted frocks that constricted the limbs of a girl used to shorts and sun-frocks, in which she could compete on equal terms with her three brothers.

Rounding a corner by the Caves' house, she rang her bell, and Peter's head appeared over the hedge.

"Hullo, Moll! Come and play darts."

"I can't. I've got to take this note to the Vaughans."

"The people who live at the Manor? Well, I'll ride with you. We'll race down the hill."

The race was an exciting one, and Molly was winning when a car came suddenly round the corner. Molly swerved, went too near the grass verge, and the next moment found herself lying in a ditch.

She scrambled out, shaken but unhurt, and stood trying to brush the mud off her clean dress. Peter, seeing that she was not hurt, began to laugh at the sight of her frock.

"Your back's simply covered with mud. Here, let me try to get it off."

He rubbed violently, doing, Molly suspected, more harm than good. Then he stood back and looked at her.

"Not too bad," he remarked uncertainly. "I mean, anyone can see the dress is clean underneath."

"That's not much comfort. You'd better take the note up for me!"

"Not I! Look at my grubby shirt—and these disreputable shorts." He indicated a rent in the seat. "Besides, Papa Vaughan and I don't see eye to eye about a little matter of a ball through one of his green-houses."

Molly sighed and remounted her bicycle. She left Peter at the Manor gates and rode up the long, tree-shaded drive to the grey Tudor mansion.

The great oak door stood open, and as Molly stretched a hand towards the wrought-iron bell-pull a girl crossed the hall. She might have been any age up to eighteen, but her clothes were far too sophisticated for a girl in her teens. Her long, green chiffon frock, her picture hat, her high-heeled green-kid shoes, were as elegant as her immaculately-waved auburn hair, her painted lips and delicately enamelled nails.

She looked with obvious distaste at Molly's mud-stained frock.

"I—I've brought a note for Mrs. Vaughan." Embarrassed by the scrutiny of those cool grey eyes, Molly held out the envelope.

"Oh!" The girl did not attempt to take it. "Hadn't you better go to the tradesman's entrance?"

Molly flushed crimson. She might look a sight, with her muddied frock and dishevelled hair, but surely anyone could tell——

"N—no!" she stuttered fiercely. "My Aunt's a friend of Mrs. Vaughan's."

"Oh, all right." The girl's eyebrows went up in a delicate gesture of surprise. "I'll take in the note. You'd better wait in the library."

She ushered Molly into a cool, book-lined room where Mrs. Vaughan presently joined her. Though chic and elegant herself, she did not appear to notice her visitor's curious appearance. She declared that she and Christabel would be delighted to have tea with Aunt Ellen on Friday, wrote a little note of thanks, and gave it to Molly with a bunch of roses for her aunt. But Molly was not pacified as she cycled down the drive.

"That horrid, dressed-up Christabel!" she fumed. "Looking at me as though I were something out of the gutter! I'm not going to be in to tea on Friday."

She kept her word. A sudden attack of toothache necessitated an urgent visit to the dentist on the afternoon of the tea-party, and to satisfy her uneasy conscience she really did spend ten minutes in the dreaded chair, while the dentist poked and prodded her teeth and found no reason why any should ache.

Afterwards, regardless of Aunt Ellen's instructions to hurry home, she went to the book-shop and spent a pleasant half-hour exchanging a book-token for a new adventure story, after which she climbed the hill above the village.

On the brow of the hill was a little wood, and from it she could look down on familiar farms and houses, her aunt's modern villa in its trim little garden, and the Manor lying just under the hill, with a path leading from its grounds to where she stood. The sight of it stirred Molly to a faint uneasiness, but it swiftly passed. Aunt Ellen would be cross with her for missing the tea-party, but she couldn't—no, she *couldn't*—have that awful Christabel thrust upon her as a companion and friend.

It was very pleasant up there in the sunshine, and Molly looked round for a shady tree to climb. A big chestnut caught her eye, and she went towards it. Suddenly she gave a little gasp of delight.

Someone had made a house in the tree—a platform of logs carefully bound together, surrounded by a low balustrade, and furnished with wooden seats and a table. There was a sun-bathing mattress on the floor with cushions, and a spirit-stove and tea-things in a corner.



Molly hesitated. She oughtn't to trespass, but it was such a fascinating place that she couldn't resist. After all, it would do no harm just to sit here for a bit.

She scrambled up, lay down on the mattress, and began to read her book, with the sunlight falling onto the page through a green tracery of leaves——

The sound of a clock striking from the village church aroused her, and she realised with a shock that she had been asleep. She looked at her watch and found that it was six o'clock. The Vaughans would be gone, and Aunt Ellen worried at her long absence

Cycling home, Molly realised that her excuse of delay at the dentist's and urgent shopping was a pretty thin reason for not getting back in time for tea. Why did excuses always seem better before than after the crime they were intended to cover?

Aunt Ellen was very angry indeed, and Molly heard in detail what would have happened to a Victorian girl who was rude enough to stay out when her Aunt was expecting visitors to tea. Seen in retrospect, it did seem rather a mean and ungracious thing to do, and she promised meekly to accompany her Aunt on a return visit to the Vaughans' the following week.

"I suppose I've got to meet Christabel some time," she told herself glumly, as she went to bed. "Still, I've had a nice time this afternoon. Good gracious, where's my book? I must have left it in the tree?"

She could not get up to the hillside the next day, but the day after she made her way to the house in the tree. Her book lay on the mattress where she had left it, but a little note fluttered from between the pages——

"Dear Minnehaha,

"I like your taste in books and have enjoyed reading the first three chapters. Please use my house whenever you like. There are things for tea in the locker."

"HIAWATHA."

Intrigued, Molly opened the locker. Yes, there was tea, sugar, and milk, a tin of biscuits, and a fruit cake. With great delight she made herself tea, and spent a happy time reading and dreaming about Hiawatha. Boy or girl, she wondered. That well-made tree-house looked like the work of a boy, but the dainty tea-set suggested a girl. Before leaving, she slipped into the locker a bar of chocolate she had brought to stave off possible pangs of hunger, and left another note inside her book.

"Dear Hiawatha,

"Thank you for your hospitality. I have left you some chocolate in the locker as a small return, and please go on reading my book."

"MINNEHAHA."

She went to the tree several times during the following week, and found notes from the mysterious owner, once with a gift of raspberries. She began to look forward to her visits, and noted on the afternoon fixed for the visit to the Vaughans' that it was a lovely day for the tree.

"Oh, dear," she sighed as she struggled into her best cotton frock, "fancy having to wear a hat and stockings *and* gloves on an afternoon like this! I wish Aunt Ellen wasn't so old-fashioned. Wonder if Christabel will have another garden-party creation."

But Christabel was not there. Mrs. Vaughan apologised for her absence, explaining, in a voice which somehow failed to carry conviction, that she had had to go out unexpectedly. Before the afternoon was over, Molly found herself almost regretting Christabel's absence, for Mrs. Vaughan had apparently intended the girls to play tennis, which would have been better than sitting and listening to the grown-ups talking. The fact that Christabel had hoist her with her own petard was, rather illogically, a fresh source of grievance to Molly.

"She doesn't like me any better than I like her," she told herself, "and she's tried to avoid me. Well, I'm glad! I hope I never see her again."

But it looked as though the meeting was still not to be avoided, for Mrs. Vaughan and Aunt Ellen were making plans to go to the Red Cross Sale at the Vicarage next day.

"I hope Christabel will be there," said Mrs. Vaughan, "so she and Molly will be able to meet. I am sure they will be friends."

"I'd rather not go, Auntie," pleaded Molly when they got home. "I—I'm awfully bored by sales of work and things."

"In my young days we accompanied our elders whether we were bored or not," said Aunt Ellen severely, "but you modern girls have no idea of how a well-conducted young visitor should behave. I am afraid you are allowed to run wild at home."

However, she did not insist, and Molly was able to slip away to the tree. But as she drew near to it she saw that the little house was occupied. A long-legged girl, with sleek dark hair, was sprawling on the mattress, reading Molly's book. She looked up at Molly's approach.

"Hello!" she exclaimed. "Are you Minnehaha?"

"Yes. I suppose you're Hiawatha?"

"I am."

Molly climbed into the tree and squatted down beside her new friend. "It was awfully kind of you to let me use your house and leave me all those nice things," she told her.

"Not a bit. I wanted to get to know you, and I knew we'd meet here sooner or later. I've been wondering what you were like. I thought by the book that you were probably about my age, but I didn't know whether you were a boy or a girl."

"I've been wondering the same about you," returned Molly. "How nice that we're such 'suitable friends', as my Aunt would say."

"Yes, isn't it? I'm often lonely in the holidays. There aren't many young people in the village."

"No," agreed Molly. "I only know Peter Cave, and my Aunt says he's too rough to play with. Still," she added, thinking of Christabel, "I'd rather be alone than have a companion I didn't like."

"Oh, rather!" agreed the stranger.

"As a matter of fact, I came here first to escape a girl I didn't want to know—a horrid, superior girl with red hair and grown-up clothes. But I expect you know her. She's called Christabel Vaughan and she lives at the Manor."

"Red hair and grown-up clothes? No, I don't think I do know her."

"Well, she was coming to tea and I simply couldn't face it. You see, I'd met her once when I called with a note at the Manor, and she obviously thought me a perfect little guttersnipe because I'd got my frock muddy through falling into a ditch. You couldn't have any fun with a girl like that."

"You couldn't!" agreed the stranger emphatically, her dark eyes twinkling. "You're Molly Byrne, I take it?"

"How do you know?"

"Oh, one hears things in the village."

"And what's your name?"

"Mary Temple. Now, let's put the kettle on."

They made tea and spent a delightful afternoon, talking and making exciting plans for the rest of the holiday. Their tastes, it seemed, were very similiar. They both loved swimming and cycling and roller-skating, and hated the croquet and cards which featured so largely in village life. They liked the same sort of books, and laughed at the same sort of things. They had similar ideas about dress, detesting formal clothes and revelling in the freedom of bare legs and shorts, though Mary complained that her mother often dressed her up, while Molly's mother didn't bother. By the end of the afternoon, Molly felt that she had found a friend after her own heart.

"I've still got ten days here," she told Mary. "We'll have time to do lots of things together."

But next morning, a blow fell. The postman brought a letter from Mrs. Vaughan, inviting Molly to spend a week at the Manor.

"But I don't want to go, Auntie," she pleaded. "I hate Christabel. We won't have a thing in common."

"It will do you good to mix with a well-bred girl like Christabel Vaughan," returned Aunt Ellen, "and you are very lucky to be invited to stay at such a lovely house. I shall certainly accept for you, and you will try to do me credit, I hope."

Despondently, Molly packed her bag. The Vaughans' car fetched her, and as she alighted at the Manor, Mrs. Vaughan came forward and kissed her.

"I'm so glad you've come, my dear," she said warmly. "It will be nice for Chris to have a young companion. Ah, here she comes."

But it was not Christabel. It was Mary Temple, cool and fresh in white linen, but still Mary Temple of the dark hair and twinkling eyes. She laughed at Molly's bewildered face.

"I'm Christabel Mary Temple-Vaughan," she informed the guest, "and that red-headed horror you met here was my cousin, Desirée, who was spending a few days with us. The poor girl's just back from a French finishing school where they've tried to turn her into a society lady, and only succeeded in making her an affected little snob."

"Chris, dear," remonstrated Mrs. Vaughan, "the poor child is only sixteen. She will outgrow her affectations."

"Well, till she does, I share Molly's feeling about her," retorted Chris. "But I'm sorry she kept us apart so long, Moll. I was dying to know you, but when Mother and I went to tea with your aunt, and you so obviously stayed out to avoid us, I was hurt and angry, and did the same thing when you came here. Still, we'll make up for lost time now. What shall we do this afternoon? Swimming, tennis, or the tree?"

"The tree," said Molly.

LANGTON LUCK

By BARBARA HECTOR

AS the bell for the dinner-hour clanged out, the mistress of the Sixth Form smiled a dismissal to her class and said, "Justine Worth! A minute, please. Will you go to the Headmistress's room? She wants a little talk with you."

Justine's heart sank. Surely, she thought as she nervously smoothed down her fair curls, surely she wasn't in for another row! It was no time since Miss How had sent for her and had given her a lecture on living up to her name. Justine! And Worth! Whatever had her parents been thinking of to name her Justine? Plus *Worth!* Parents! You'd think neither of them had ever been to school, their daughter savagely reflected now. It was just the sort of name a Head would fuss over!

Justine had been told that she must set an example to her classmates and her juniors. And now, she thought resentfully, she'd be told that she was still failing to exert the necessary influence.

"Come in!" said Miss How, in answer to Justine's light tap upon the panels of the door that led into the Headmistress's pretty sitting-room. "Ah, Justine my dear! And do you find living up to your name a very hard occupation?" Justine inwardly groaned, but Miss How smiled whimsically, "Perhaps you find you haven't much scope?"

Justine began to feel relieved. Her blue eyes met the Head's grey ones frankly, and saw that Miss How's alert little face was bright with kindly animation. Justine *wasn't* in for another lecture apparently!

"Yes, Miss How," the girl murmured tentatively.

"I want you to show your *worth*, Justine," smiled Miss How. "It—it is Louise Langton."

Louise Langton!

Justine glanced at the calendar that stood on the tidy desk.

"It's the closing date for the Art Scholarship!" she exclaimed.

"It is!" said Miss How meaningly. "And you know Louise!"

Justine did. She liked Louise, she would have liked her for her best friend, but Louise seemed to prefer to sail through life on her own—chumless and a little remote. She was a sport, ever in trouble with her teachers. But she wanted no company upon her daring escapades. But then Louise was no normal schoolgirl!

Louise—daughter of the famous painter, the late Ludovic Langton, R.A.—was not an *ordinary* girl. She had inherited not only her father's gifts, but also his artistic temperament. Nothing but art mattered—to Louise.

The Art Scholarship meant that Louise, otherwise practically penniless, would be able to receive the systematic training her still dilettantish art required but, like her dead father, she was regardless of money matters. She had had to be *driven* to enter for the Scholarship.

"Louise is to be interviewed by the Art School Scholarship Committee in Winton St. Luke at six this evening." Miss How went on. "Louise—and her exhibition drawings—must be at the Art School by a quarter to six. I had arranged for your form mistress to accompany Louise." The Head paused and smiled. "And now my time table has gone all awry. Two mistresses are down with 'flu and the School Governors have selected this afternoon for their *surprise* annual inspection of the school buildings. Every class—and every mistress—must be on the *qui vive*. You know what our Governors are like! And so, Justine, I'm asking you—I'm *making you responsible* for Louise!"

Justine said, "Yes, Miss How. I'll be glad to help, Miss How." But inwardly she sighed.

Louise could be the limit! A lovely sunset, a playful, long-legged foal in a field, a dew-spangled spider web—anything, in fact, might fire the head-strong, temperamental Louise to pull out a sketching block,

and flash on to paper a vivid little drawing of whatever caught her eye. Louise was always late for everything! Her sketching block was ever her excuse and because of her brilliant technique, her wonderful gift of clever portraiture, she was always forgiven.

"I've got Langton Luck," she would explain when other girls, writing up lines as a punishment for their lateness, envied Louise her good fortune.

But Langton Luck wouldn't melt the hearts of the austere members of the Art School Scholarship Committee, thought Justine Worth ruefully. Louise—with her exhibition sketches—*must* be at the Art School in Winton at five forty-five. And although it was the dinner break now, getting Louise anywhere by a given time was a tough job. Justine's pretty face assumed a determined air.

"You'll catch the three o'clock bus into Winton," Miss How continued. "That will get you to town in plenty of time. Even if you miss it and have to take the next! I know Louise! Then, I suggest, tea at Judy's."

The Headmistress paused. Judy's Jam Jar is a tea shop in the High Street, the quaint, small paned, curved windows of the Georgian house having given Judy Holt, a St. Clare's old girl, the name which had now become so well known in the surrounding district. The Jam Jar meant fragrant tea and coffee, feather-light cakes, home-made jams, and, for the girls of St. Clare's, a special welcome.

"There will be time after tea for Louise to have a wash and brush up before her important interview, Justine," the Headmistress concluded. "You'll get her to the Art School nice and early, I know. I trust you utterly, Justine."

"Yes, Miss How. Thank you, Miss How," said Justine, with less confidence than her tone implied.

But she need not have worried. Louise, strangely enough, was quite amenable to reason. Neat and tidy, she met Justine in the hall at the appointed time.

"You've got the sketches? *All* the sketches?" queried the anxious Justine, determined to prove her *worth* to the popular Head of St. Clare's School.

Louise nodded her dark head and held out a large envelope.

"I've been over them three times, just to make sure, and they're all there," she replied brightly.

"But shouldn't they be in a—a portfolio, or a—case, or—something stiff and more imposing?" asked Justine.

Louise's black eyes danced.

"You're just like Miss How, my pet! She's been at me all day, like a fussy old hen with one duckling for a chick!"

"But—that envelope! It—it's just an envelope," Justine persisted.

"Good enough," beamed Louise. "Say, Justine, we'll miss the bus if we don't get a move on," she added.

They caught the bus.

"Old How-are-you——" The Clarites' affectionate nickname for their Headmistress! "—did give me a portfolio affair," Louise admitted as they sped townwards. "But I left it by the open window last night and it is as wet as a pond."

"Sure you didn't have your precious sketches inside it?"

"Shrewd Justine!" laughed Louise. "Only one, my dear. And I touched it up this morning. Believe me, I'm a reformed character. I'm as keen as anyone to win that schol. My mother, you know, spent last weekend in Winton with the sole purpose of instilling into me the importance of getting it. We're as poor as paupers. Daddy's pals are paying my school fees, but they can't do any more for me. So you see if I don't win—I—I'll just have to earn my living any old way! Which would be beastly. Think of selling papers when one might be painting!"

"I'm glad you feel that way about it." Justine sighed with genuine relief. "I'm responsible for you—so I was told by Miss How. And I'm *not* trusting to Langton Luck, Louise!"

"No need," Louise assured her airily. "I've left my much regretted



artistic temperament at school! But—Langton Luck *can* be depended upon!”

“Don’t let’s risk it,” pleaded Justine.

The two girls had a gay little tea at the well-filled Jam Jar; hot buttered toast, some of Judy Holt’s renowned iced chocolate cake, and creamy meringues to finish with.

“Here’s Judy herself!” cried Justine, as the owner of the tea shop came forward to greet the girls.

“I’ve been busy with an order for a birthday cake,” she explained. “I’ve had to leave the tea room to my waitress girls this afternoon.”

“We’ve had a lovely tea,” dimpled Justine.

Judy smiled. “I’m so glad, my dear. And how is the scholarship girl?” she asked.

“Complete with hope—and sketches,” replied Louise.

“And caretaker,” smiled Judy. “Miss How phoned me up this morning with such instructions! When you’ve finished tea, don’t use

the ladies' toilet room. Go up to my bedroom. You know it, Justine. I've set out my best brushes, etc! I'm to come up and inspect. Not a hair out of place, Louise! Stocking seams straight. Shoe laces——"

"Oh! How Howish!" laughed Louise. "Like to see my sketches, Judy?"

The envelope was opened and Judy Holt held up first one exquisite little sketch and then another, the three girls utterly unaware of the interested audience they had around them. The people at the nearby tables smiled at the eager little group, or craned forward to catch a glimpse of the sketches.

"They're lovely!" exclaimed Judy. "You're sure to win that schol., my dear. And doesn't *L. Langton*, scrawled on a corner, look impressive?"

Louise frowned.

"I want to make my own name!" she averred. "It's rather rotten having the same initials as Father. He signed everything *L. Langton*. And I have to do the same. *Louise* sounds so—un-English and rather artcrafty, don't you think?"

Her voice, clear as a bell, seemed to fill the room, but the three girls were so engrossed in their own affairs that they were unaware of being overheard.

"We must go now," Justine suggested reluctantly, rising from the table.

"Not till you've seen my cake," smiled Judy, handing the sketches back to Louise. "It's *my* artistic effort," she added.

"We've heaps of time really," Justine admitted. And, "Got *all* the sketches, Lou?" she asked as she joined Judy.

"You bet," answered Louise, following.

They crossed the room, which was emptying now, and Judy led the way through the slit of a serving room into the tiny kitchen beyond.

"I always marvel at the amount of baking and cooking that's done in this small place," Justine told Judy, not noticing that Louise had not followed them in.

"Method!" laughed Judy. "And *not* too many cooks!"

"Oh!" gasped Justine, catching sight of the side table. "What a lovely cake!"

It stood three tiers high, a pink and white confection topped with four multi-coloured candles.

"Lovely!" echoed Louise from the doorway. "Wish I had a birthday in view!"

"Same here!" sighed Justine.

Judy flushed with pleasure, but she did not forget her promise, made earlier in the day, to her old Headmistress.

"Run along then, you two. I only allowed you a peep!" she said.

"It's starting to rain and we'll have to sit hours in that mouldy Art School," complained Louise, pouting.

"But you'll be there! It's wisest to be there—then there can't be any mishaps," smiled Judy, almost shooing the two girls out of the kitchen and up a narrow staircase.

"You fuss me like a young mother at a baby show!" teased Louise, when her navy coat had been tweeked into neat folds at the waist, her hair combed, her collar brushed, her hat arranged so that the brim dipped attractively over one twinkling eye.

"Well, you are a show baby," retorted Justine.

But she was proud of her handiwork. The temperamental Louise usually threw on her clothes anyhow. This afternoon, however, she looked the perfect schoolgirl, neat and tidy, her pretty face sufficiently roguish to make its own appeal.

"You'll do," Justine affirmed.

"More than that!" cried Judy, linking her arm in Justine's. "She'll win that scholarship and be famous. Then she'll forget all about us humdrum people!"

"I shan't! I'll never forget either of you," Louise promised.

"So long as you don't forget the sketches——" began Justine. Then

she glanced sharply at her schoolmate and added anxiously, "And just where are those precious sketches now?"

Louise beamed reassuringly.

"The man at the corner table asked to have a squint at them," she replied. "He knew Father, he said." Justine and Judy exchanged horrified glances. "I felt quite famous—a personality!" Louise went on. "He wanted to study my work, so I showed him the sketches and I'm to pick 'em up on my way out."

"Let's go—and collect them then," said Justine uneasily, feeling she couldn't really be happy until she had shepherded the troublesome Louise—plus sketches—into the presence of the Art School Scholarship Committee.

"Oh, it'll be all right, fusspot," Louise said airily, following the others down the steep stairs. "He was a charming man! And he knew about painting—and painters."

"Perhaps he knew too much," murmured Judy, who leading the way, had caught a glimpse of the vacated corner table!

"Why! He's—gone!" exclaimed Louise, her cheeks growing pale. Then she laughed. "Aren't we idiots? He'll have left the sketches with one of the waitresses."

But he had not! He had paid his bill some little time ago and had hurried out of the tea shop. Consternation followed.

"If the sketches were in a large envelope," one of the waitresses told the girls, "then he took that with him. I saw him roll up the envelope. He went out of the shop carrying it."

"Whatever shall we do?" gasped Justine, her blue eyes troubled.

"He'll bring 'em back," Louise averred. "He—he's maybe forgetful—like I am sometimes. Artistic temperament, you know."

"We must get in touch with the police," said Justine crisply, glancing apprehensively at the clock.

"Chucks! There's loads of time! And he's sure to bring them back," Louise repeated unconvincingly. She laid a restraining hand on Justine's

arm. "Be reasonable, infant," she begged. "No one would steal *my* sketches! They're absolutely worthless!"

"They're signed *L. Langton!*" snapped Justine. "Your father's reputation has grown even since his death. An *L. Langton* sketch is not valueless! Especially in America."

"But they're mine—the immature work of a schoolgirl!"

"They might be the work of the immature schoolboy—Ludovic Langton!" cried the irate Justine.

Judy intervened. "Don't make a scene, girls, please," she said quietly. And added, "We're in luck. That man by the window is a police-inspector out of uniform. He's a regular customer. I'll go and. . . ."

She had already gone.

Louise beamed annoyingly. "Langton Luck," she muttered. "Come on, Justine. Let's join them."

Judy had explained things to Police-Inspector Morton. She introduced the girls quickly.

"You'd recognise the man again, Miss Langton?" he queried.

"You bet," answered Louise.

"Come on then, girls," the Inspector commanded. "My car is outside. I've a notion I saw the gent get into a car and drive off westward. He was a stranger to me."

"He is quite—quite outstanding," Louise asserted. "In appearance, I mean."

"Yes? Describe him!" snapped the Inspector, bundling himself and the two girls into a dark roadster that seemed designed for speed. It shot forward through the slanting rain.

"Oh, let me see," began Louise tantalisingly. "His eyes were—kindly. Honestly, I'm sure he isn't a thief. His face is—quite ordinary. Not ugly or sketchable, I mean. He's tallish. Well dressed. Light overcoat."

The Inspector groaned. "Every man in Winton might answer that description. What was *outstanding* about him?"

Louise bit her lip. "His niceness—I—er—suppose," she confessed lamely.

The Inspector seemed to flick the temperamental Louise from his mind. When he spoke again he addressed Justine.

"I'll stop for a moment at the cross-roads at the end of the High Street," he said. "The constable on duty may be able to tell us something. Also there's the Police Station nearby. We'd better have a chap in uniform with us."

As he spoke the car snuggled in to the kerb and in a flash the Inspector had dashed across the traffic filled street to the policeman on point duty.

"Inspectors don't wait for the mere police constable to sign them on!" chuckled Louise. Then, "Gosh, it really is raining now! Thank goodness my hair curls naturally. I'd hate to go before the Committee all wet and rats-taily."

Justine said nothing. She suppressed an urgent desire to take Louise by the shoulders and shake her.

"It is a pity my friend went this way, out west," continued Louise thoughtfully and quite unperturbed. "If he went over the moors the mist will be so thick we'll have difficulty in overtaking him."

"The railway crossing may hold us up," said Justine flatly.

"Or him—and let us through," chirped the cheerful believer in Langton Luck.

"Well, the Inspector hasn't taken long," remarked Justine watching the plain clothes man and his satellite constable dodge a farm truck and then dart in front of a bus.

The Inspector climbed into the car and grinned at the girls.

"Our friend isn't far ahead of us," he said as the car rocketed forward. "He has been seen having trouble with a tyre beyond the village of Heathedge."

No one spoke after that. Inspector Morton's face was grim. He needed to concentrate all his attention upon his driving. As the shopping thoroughfare gave place to houses, and then the houses to open moorland,

moisture dappled the windscreen and great wisps of mist hung over the crown of the road, cutting down visibility considerably.

Keeping well in to the left side of the road, the car zoomed along at breakneck speed, the Inspector sitting well forward as he peered ahead.

"Sing out if you see anything in front," he ordered.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Louise. "Isn't the mist positively wizard? It's most frightfully effective. Such a deliciously eerie atmosphere, don't you think?"

The trivial words hung apprehensively in the air. For a moment Justine pictured Louise pulling out her sketching block and at the same time urging the Inspector to stop the car in order that she might make a lightning representation of the scene on paper. But whatever Louise's inclination might have been, she did not voice it.

Instead she said, "If my friend is a stranger to the district, he won't know the road as well as you do, Inspector—er—Mr. Morton. So we've got luck on our side!"

"And *he* has time—a good start—on his!" snapped the Inspector.

"But he lost it—with that tyre of his," Louise pointed out. Adding, "We're at Heathedge already." A few scattered cottages flashed by. "Then there's the level crossing. He's sure to be held up at it—and we'll get straight through."

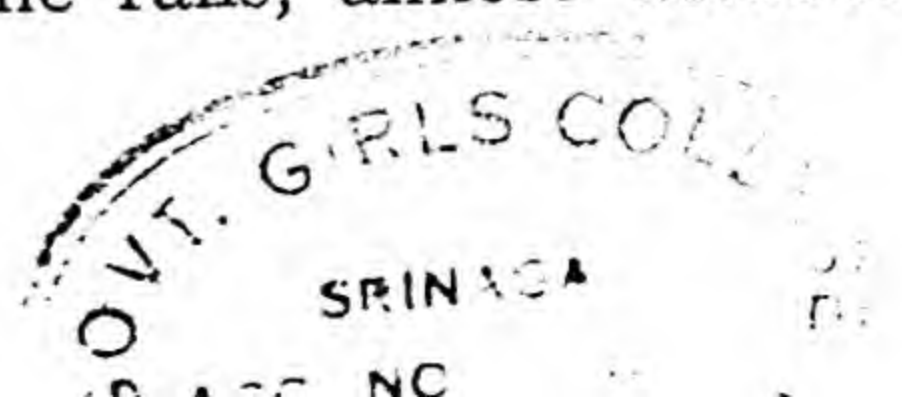
The Inspector said nothing, he did not ask for any justification of Louise's assurance.

"Langton Luck, you know," Louise vouchsafed blandly.

The policeman sitting behind them spoke for the first time.

"Missie may be right," he averred. "There's always a long wait round about tea time. Two pass. and a goods! I know, my pal is a signalman."

He—and Louise—might both be right. At any rate the white gates were open and the police car dashed across the rails, almost without slackening speed.



"Thicker now," remarked the policeman laconically, referring to the mist.

Justine flicked back the cuff edge of her coat, glanced apprehensively at her wrist watch, and sighed. Louise saw the action and leaning forward glimpsed at the dial. She did a rapid calculation in her head and remarked brightly that if they overtook their quarry within the next ten minutes, they had just time to retrieve the sketches and be back in Winton for the interview.

"That is, if you hog it as quickly back—as we've come, Inspector," she concluded sweetly.

No one spoke for a few moments.

"Something ahead of us!" bawled the constable.

"*His* car!" hissed the Inspector.

A dark blue shape showed up clearly now, apparently travelling more cautiously than the police car was doing. But the man at the wheel sensed that he was being followed. Justine caught a glimpse of a gloved hand giving the jutting out mirror a quick rub.

"And is he travelling?" she exclaimed, as the car in front of them shot into the mist.

"We're the faster of the two!" remarked Louise complacently.

"But he's ahead of us and he has command of the road," the Inspector pointed out grimly.

Louise digested this information and whistled.

"How brainy of him!" she exclaimed admiringly. "While he keeps on the centre of the road we can't overtake!"

Justine closed her eyes for a second. She hated this mad, reckless rush through the mist—yet she was thrilled. Ten minutes, they had. Louise had said ten minutes! They *must* overtake the blue car. They *must* get the sketches and be back in Winton in time for Louise's interview. They must do it—for the sake of Louise's future, to please Miss How, to prove that Justine Worth could live up to her name.

Behind her closed lids, Justine visualised the road ahead.

Then suddenly, "Got it!" she cried. "Inspector Morton, we're coming to a beech wood and at the end of it there's a road forking to the right and an empty space in front of a large garage. This man won't know that, if he's a stranger."

The Inspector gave a whoop of delight. He'd forgotten it, he mumbled.

"*Then,*" went on Justine, "the road bottle-necks, rather. An old toll house juts out on the right side and a little further on there is a bow fronted old house. Remember?"

"You bet I do!" exclaimed the Inspector.

"Langton Luck," murmured Louise.

"I'd call it—this young lady's brainwave!" cut in the constable from the back.

"Langton Luck all the same," Louise averred. "Ooh!"

The police car was rocketing forward at a terrific speed. Tall beech trees swathed in cotton woolly mist raced to meet them, swept by and disappeared. More and more trees followed. The blue car was horribly near now. What if it stopped suddenly? The road was like glass, wet and slippery. If they skidded!

They tore along. The police car was going all out. The blue one sensed its nearness and edged further to the right. The deep ditch, between the road and the beech wood yawned dangerously up at the occupants of the police car. The ditch rim was soggy looking and treacherous. The Inspector ignored it, egging the car on. They were neck and neck now. The blue car tore along, safe on the crown of the road; the police car rocketed onwards regardless of the ditch, oblivious to the possibility of on-coming traffic, apparently unaware of the dangerous proximity of the blue car.

The beech wood was coming to an end. The side road forked to the right, Justine remembered. If any vehicle should chance to be turning into the main road. . . .

"Whoopee!" yelled Louise as the police car swooped still further

to the right, swept past the side road, the garage—and the speeding blue car! It shot ahead like an arrow from a bow.

“Be ready to jump,” yelled the Inspector, his face tense.

“We’re a length in front,” breathed the constable.

“Langton Luck,” whispered Louise.

“Two lengths,” cried the constable.

On, on, they tore. Would they never slow down? They zipped past the old toll house missing it by inches. On, on. The chill mist whipping their faces. They slowed down imperceptibly now. The bow fronted old house loomed up menacingly through the mist. There was a scream of brakes and shrieks from the girls as the car lurched dangerously and swung broadside on.

They jumped clear, the air seeming to be full of hurtling bodies, of shouts, the metallic, piercing shriek of still more brakes.

“Quick! Get him, folks!” yelled the Inspector.

But the man in the blue car had the advantage of them. As his car screeched to a standstill he was already on the road and racing along it—in the direction of the old toll house and the beech wood. The Inspector and the constable had to dodge their own car, and pass the blue one, before they could give chase. Instinctively the girls darted forward but Louise put a restraining hand upon Justine’s arm.

“Did you see if the man had the envelope in his hand?” she asked breathlessly. “I couldn’t see, but I thought he hadn’t. And now the mist has swallowed him up!”

“He wouldn’t leave the sketches behind him, silly,” retorted Justine. “If they were worth stealing, they were worth——”

But Louise was already in the blue car, searching beneath the floor mat, in the door pockets, under the seat.

“It’s just what he wouldn’t do,” she argued. “If he really was stealing, he’d be far too clever to risk the chance of being caught with the sketches on him. See?”

There was something in that, thought Justine reluctantly.

"But they aren't here," she pointed out.

Louise, her frantic but thorough search nearly over, paused to shrug her shoulders.

"It certainly looks as if they were not here," she admitted. "And the man made for the beech wood and the moor! They'll never get him. The mist is so thick. And I'll never get that scholarship!" She gave a forced laugh in a vain endeavour to hide her disappointment. "Never mind, Justine, I'll get a job at Judy's Jam Jar! I'll ice birthday cakes, and I'll paint pictures in my spare time."

There was a sob in her voice which the tactful Justine tried, but failed, to ignore.

"You'd hate that," said Justine sympathetically. Adding more cheerfully as a bright idea came to her, "But—Judy's would do as a makeshift, Louise! You could be earning money and then next year you can try again."

Louise turned away abruptly, not wishing her friend to see how her eyes had brimmed with stinging tears.

"That's just what I can't do! Try again!" she exclaimed in a tense tone. "There's an age limit. This year is my only chance. And—and Mother—she wanted me most awfully to win it."

So did everyone—Miss How, the Art Mistress, every girl at St. Clare's, thought Justine.

She felt desperate.

"Where could the man have put these sketches?" she asked herself, her brow puckered into a frown. Then, "I have it! They told us he'd been seen having trouble with a tyre, outside Heathedge, remember? You can hide an envelope quite safely between the outer cover and an inner tube."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Louise.

"Exercise that Langton Luck of yours, Lou, and tell me which tyre to tackle first?" snapped Justine, already searching below the car seat for the necessary tools.

"Langton Luck!" murmured Louise. "Oh, I hope you're right, Justine! Perhaps—it was lucky the portfolio got wet! The man couldn't have hidden a portfolio in a tyre! He'd have had to take the sketches with him and they'd have been lost for ever."

"He maybe has them with him still," Justine reminded her crisply. Adding, "Now then, which tyre?"

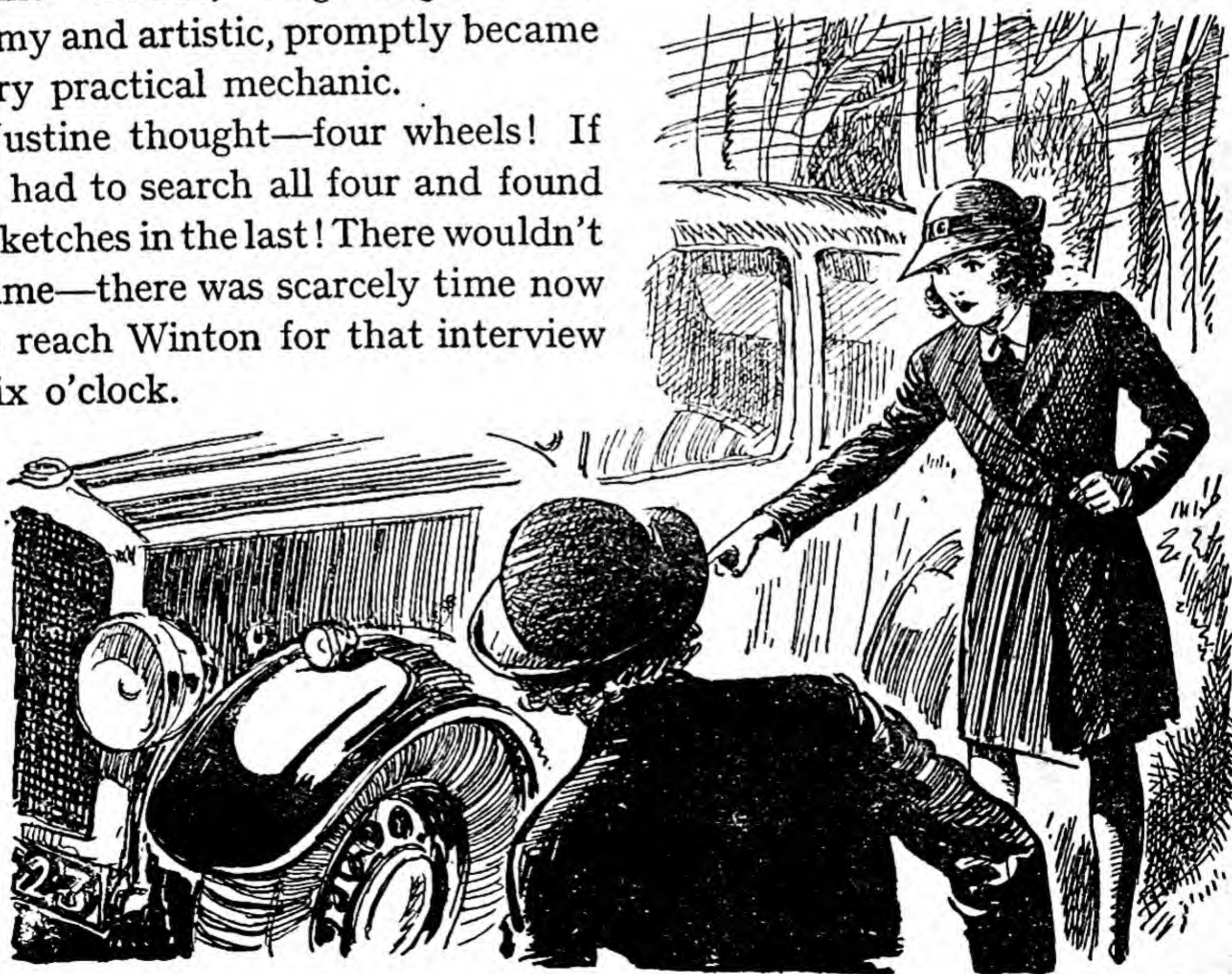
Closing her eyes for a second, Louise pondered. Then, as if repeating the words of a witch's spell, she said, "Come, Langton Luck! Help Langton Lou. Come, tell her what she ought to do! That tyre!" she concluded firmly, pointing to one of the front wheels.

Justine lost no time. She was feverishly jacking up the car.

"Lend a hand," she begged.

And Louise, forgetting to be dreamy and artistic, promptly became a very practical mechanic.

Justine thought—four wheels! If they had to search all four and found the sketches in the last! There wouldn't be time—there was scarcely time now—to reach Winton for that interview at six o'clock.



The same thought occurred in Louise's mind. But, as usual, art held prior place.

"They're hideous things—tyres!" she murmured. "Ugly, ugly, ugly!"

But all the time her nimble fingers were busy. Getting a tyre off a wheel needs strength and both girls struggled manfully.

"One tyre off!" Justine half sobbed as the thick rubber cover began to be eased over the wheel's rim.

One tyre—and there were three, perhaps, to remove! Justine dared not look at her watch. Dared not feel inside the thick rubber cover for the sketches.

Louise slipped a small hand between the cover and the inner tube. Justine held her breath. For a split second Louise groped in vain. Then——

"Langton Luck!" she triumphed.

The sketches, quite unharmed, *were* in the tyre Louise had selected. And in a very few minutes the two girls were back in the police car, racing towards Winton.

"Langton Luck that I can drive," sang out Louise. "The mist is lifting and we'll just do it. Thanks to you, Justine," she added gratefully.

She won the scholarship, of course, and now Justine Worth treasures an artistic little memento of that thrilling afternoon—an exquisite little water-colour of mist-draped beech trees and a winding white road.



MYSTERY MANSION

By M. BRAND

"HERE'S Swanlake, Val!"

At her friend's words, Valerie looked eagerly from the window of the luxurious car as it swept through crested, iron gates, and drew to a standstill before a beautiful Elizabethan manor.

As Clare Windon and Valerie stepped from the motor, a smiling lady came quickly forward, and led them into a large, panelled hall. A log fire was crackling merrily, and a frisky collie rose to its feet and bounded towards them.

Patting the dog's head, Valerie smiled thankfully as Mrs. Windon went to speak to the chauffeur. Returning to her visitor, with the same kindly smile, she took Valerie's cold hand between her own warm ones.

"Clare, I'm sure your friend will welcome a hot meal. Lunch will be served in half an hour. Take Valerie to her room."

Happily the two girls ran up the broad oak staircase. Mrs. Windon watched them with interest. What a contrast they made; her daughter, Clare, snug in her expensive clothes, and Valerie, in a worn, thin coat.

Laughing and talking, the friends hurried down many wide corridors, till they reached the guest's room, and Clare pushed open the door. Just one little gasp of delight and wonder escaped Valerie, as she looked round that lovely room. The light of a welcoming fire flickered on the panelled walls, and cosy armchairs were drawn invitingly close to the hearth. In a corner, an oak bed, orange quilted, gave an added suggestion of real comfort.

A maid carried in Valerie's small case, then she was left to her own devices. She took off her coat and hat, and plunged her face and hands into a basin of warm water. Then came a real problem; what to wear.

The contents of her luggage were not very reassuring, and she viewed them with dismay. At last she chose a simple blue frock, hoping that Clare and her mother would not notice its shabby and rather faded appearance.

Lunch was a revelation to her. Never had she eaten such a delightful meal. A perfect hostess, Mrs. Windon soon engaged her guest in easy conversation.

"You must have had a cold journey, Valerie. Still, you have come to the right part of the country for spring sunshine. It always seems warmer here in April than anywhere else in England."

"Yes, father often talked of Swanlake, the village and the old church. I've been longing to see it for myself."

Under the kindly influence of true hospitality, Valerie felt quite at her ease and almost happy.

Mrs. Windon watched the thoughtful grey eyes of her daughter's friend, and seemed to divine the reason for the shadow that occasionally crept into them.

"How is your mother, dear?" she asked. "It is a pity the journey is too far for her."

"She would have loved to have come, Mrs. Windon. It was so kind of you to ask her, but lately she has found it even more difficult to get about. Of course, I should not have been able to come, if an auntie had not offered to look after her."

Mrs. Windon smiled understandingly.

"Yes, the last three years must have been very difficult for you both."

"It *has* been a struggle since daddy died abroad. Mother is so thankful that I won that scholarship. So am I, for otherwise I shouldn't be at school with Clare."

"Well, Valerie, you are always welcome here for part of your holidays. Now I'll leave you two girls to talk while I go and write some letters," and with a kindly smile at the guest, Mrs. Windon went to her study.

As lunch was now over, both girls drew chairs to the blazing hall fire. For a few moments, there was silence but for the crackling of the logs, then,

"Clare, who lives in that queer old manor, about a mile from here? We passed it in the car this morning."

"Oh! you mean 'Mystery Mansion.' I don't know who lives there. As a matter of fact, there's something rather strange about that place. Nobody has ever been seen to go in or come out. Yet there's always one room lit up in the evenings. People in the village say that the Manor is haunted. No one will go near it at night."

"How thrilling! Is there a ghost?"

"I think there is. A queer figure has been seen wandering round the grounds at midnight. It carries a candle, and walks very slowly. It's impossible to say what it is. No one has gone near enough to find out."

Valerie shivered deliciously at the description, and she was just going to hear more about the mysterious house, when,

"What about a walk Val?" asked Clare.

"I'd love it. The country round here is so jolly, especially that common we crossed this morning."

"Right, the common it shall be!"

It was just after three o'clock when the girls set out.

"We may not be back to tea, mother. So don't wait for us."

And sure enough an inviting little village teashop proved too great a temptation.

Fortified by buttered toast, cake and tea, they continued their ramble.

"If we are to be in time for dinner, we had better hurry," and Clare set off at a brisk run across the common, followed by Valerie.

"Oh bother!" Hearing these words and a thump, Clare stopped and looked round, to see Valerie sitting on the ground. Hastily she returned to her friend.

"Hurt yourself?"

"No, but I can't move. I've got my foot caught in this creeper stuff. And I can't get it out on my own."

Clare knelt down, and dragged the vine from her friend's foot.

"There you are, is that all right? Now we'd better . . . Hallo, what's this!"

"What's what?"

"Here, look!" and Clare pulled the creeper farther apart, to disclose an iron ring in the ground.

Breathlessly, the two looked at it; then Clare grasped hold of the iron and pulled. Ever so slightly, a square of earth moved upwards.

"Lend me a hand. There's something here."

Valerie joined her strength to that of her friend, and again the two girls tugged.

Slowly the square of earth moved upwards and, after a final hoist to one side, a dark hole was disclosed.

"Whatever is it!" Valerie knelt down and peered in, but it was too dark to see anything.

"I know, the very thing. Try this." And Clare took a small torch from her pocket.

Flashing it into the hole, Valerie saw an iron ladder leading down, it was hard to say how far.

The girls looked at each other excitedly.

"Wonder where it goes?" and Valerie pushed the torch farther into the darkness.

"Shall we find out?" queried Clare joining her friend.

For a moment she hesitated, then with difficulty Valerie lowered herself onto the ladder. Quickly followed by her friend, she climbed down and down what seemed hundreds of rungs, till the air became very close and difficult to breathe.

When they did reach the foot of the ladder, the torch showed them to be in a deep well, moss-grown and narrow. But at first the questing light could discover nothing but cobwebs and stone slabs.

"Better go up again ; only an old well," from Clare in a disappointed tone.

"Yes, there doesn't . . . Look!"

The beam of the torch rested on a low wooden door. Clare crossed the confined space, and tried the rotting woodwork. It yielded to her touch.

A long passage stretched before them, ending in darkness beyond the ray of light. More cobwebs and bad air made it far from inviting, but now both girls were thoroughly excited and ready for adventure.

After they had walked and clambered for about half an hour, they noticed that the walls were wood panelled and no longer of stone. With an exclamation, Valerie pulled up short, as the way was barred by a door. It had no fastening of any kind, and their combined weight would not move it.

"Seems hopeless," sighed Clare, then she stumbled in the semi-darkness, and clutched at the door to save herself from falling.

As she regained her balance, there was a faint click, and the woodwork swung open. Before the girls stretched a long gallery, gloomy in the dusk. On the walls were the shadowy outlines of pictures. Quietly the friends crept from the secret passage, leaving the panelling open behind them. Gallery after dark gallery they traversed. It was obvious they were in a large mansion, though it seemed to them completely deserted.

Puzzled and rather awed, they had just rounded yet another corner, when they came to a sudden standstill.

At the end of the passage before them stood a figure. It seemed to be part of the deep shadows around. In its hand it held a candle.

Terrified, the girls stood unable to move, as the form glided into the dusk and disappeared.

Valerie drew a quick breath, and grasped the torch which she had previously extinguished.

"Come on ; let's risk it." And she started forward, followed less readily by Clare.



A hundred yards farther on, they came to a door, slightly ajar. The room beyond seemed in darkness.

Curiously, Valerie peeped in, then an involuntary gasp escaped her. Seated in front of a small wood fire, was a little old lady, wrapped in shawls. On the window seat stood a dim lamp.

Valerie's surprised gasp must have reached her ears for, "Who's there?" she asked anxiously, turning a wrinkled face in the direction of the door.

As the 'ghost' seemed very human after all, the friends thought that it was best to disclose their presence. So they advanced slowly into the room.

"Who are you?" quavered the old lady, getting with difficulty to her feet, and raising a candle from the table.

The girls stood silent for a moment, then "I'm Clare Windon from Swanlake."

"And I'm Valerie," said her friend.

"Who spoke then? I know that voice. Who are you?" The old lady tottered towards Valerie, and the hand that held the candle shook.

Unnerved for a moment, the latter was silent, then "I'm Valerie Northern."

"Northern! did you say Northern?" The old lady drew nearer. "Let me look at you child." Tremblingly the candle was held closely to Valerie's face, then slowly lowered.

"David, David, why did you leave me! Where are you now?" For a moment Valerie was forgotten.

"Why do you say 'David'?" she asked eagerly. "That was my father's name."

The old lady turned eagerly towards her.

"Your father, did you say child? Was your father David Northern? Are you like him? Your voice is just like his."

"Yes, I'm considered very like my father. Why, did you know him?"

"He left this house a great many years ago. I turned him away. He married against my wishes. Where is he now child, where is he?"

"He died three years ago," answered Valerie quietly.

With a little moan of anguish, the old lady tottered back to the fireside.

"Dead! And I never saw him again."

The silence was broken by Valerie.

"But who are you?"

"His mother."

"Daddy's mother; then you are my grandmother!"

Words of explanation followed, the old lady laughing and crying in turn.

"I live alone, except for one faithful servant. Because he lived here, I never wanted to leave this house. But it is much too big for me. I'm a lonely old woman, feared and shunned by the villagers. And I'm afraid I have not many years before me."

"But Grandmother, why not come and live with Mother and me? We are poor, but we would do our best to make you comfortable."

"But I live here in poverty, child. I should only be a greater burden upon you. You have enough to bear already."

"But we'd love to have you, Grandmother. We don't mind if you are poor, we could manage."

"Come here, child."

Valerie went eagerly towards her, to be held tightly by those feeble hands.

"You are the first person for years, except my servant, who has wanted me for myself, and not for my money. Though I live in poverty, I'm very rich. For myself I had no use for my money. For your mother and you, I have every use for it. The two of you shall live here. I will try to atone for the great wrong I did your father."

Old Mrs. Northern was as good as her word. Valerie and her mother came to live in Mystery Mansion, for so they loved to call it still. Though now it was repaired and had regained all its former splendour.

In the jolly parties that Valerie gave, the elder Mrs. Northern was always a great favourite, and one of the merriest was surely Valerie's mother, whom a clever specialist had restored to complete health.

“FRIGHTENED ISAAC!”

By CONSTANCE M. WHITE

PATSY Dare wandered listlessly by herself in the school garden, her dark eyes wistful as she listened enviously to the jolly sound of girls' voices calling to one another. She wished she could make friends. She had not been at the school long, but already she was quite sure they thought her stand-offish and silly, when she was really shy.

Patsy sighed a little. Her thoughts went back to the little village where she had lived with Grandma, who was all of her family. Daddy and Mummy had died when she was too little to miss them. Gran was a darling and lots of fun in many ways, but now that Patsy had come away from her to boarding-school she felt different from all the other girls. They did all the things Gran had said were dangerous, unladylike and noisy, and seemed to thoroughly enjoy doing them, too.

“Oh, excuse me . . . I'm sorry! Did I make you jump?” said a laughing voice, as a tall girl with swinging plaits, as fair as Patsy's were dark, suddenly bounced round a corner right into Patsy's arms.

“No . . . that's all right,” said Patsy, recovering her breath and reddening furiously; for Brenda Freeman was the captain of Patsy's form and in her eyes all that a schoolgirl should be.

Brenda turned away, then swung round quickly.

“We're just going to start a game of rounders. Why don't you join in? It's too cold to stand about,” she said, in her merry voice.

“Er . . . er . . .” began Patsy, searching her mind for an excuse; but Brenda already had her by the arm and was pulling her gently along.

“Oh, come along. You're feeling a bit out of things now, but you'll soon get to like us if you'll only try.”

She beamed at Patsy with such a wide jolly smile that she couldn't refuse and allowed herself to be dragged towards a group of girls at the bottom of the garden, where the ground widened out to a big, open space.

Patsy thought it was a dreadful game.

She was so nervous that she couldn't hit the ball, even at the third throwing, and when everyone shouted “Run!” she dashed like a frightened rabbit, usually to the wrong place, and was pronounced “out”.

The other girls were quite nice about it, but when they began another game they didn't press Patsy to join in when she said she would rather not, and presently she wandered away again and settled down in a sheltered corner with a book.

The next day she was introduced to hockey. After a few preliminary instructions Miss Johns, the games mistress, put her in a practice game.

“We'll make you right wing for the moment,” she said, briskly and kindly, eyeing Patsy's long slim legs appraisingly, “You look as if you should be able to run.”

Patsy could certainly run. It was one of the few sports Gran had approved of and she had run many races with the village children, and beaten them too.

It wasn't the running that Patsy minded. It was the ball. It was so terribly hard and once, when it came her way, she tried to hit it and it ran up her stick to her thumb, making it swollen and painful. Patsy couldn't help remembering Gran's words:

“If you *have* to play hockey, dear, do be very careful. Personally, I think it a dangerous and unladylike game, and I once heard of a girl who had a dreadful accident. . . .”

At the end of the game Miss Johns was still brisk, but not quite so kind.

“Don't be so frightened of the ball, child. Just hit it squarely. You seem to be running *away* from it, not *after* it.”

Some of the other girls tittered and Patsy went red. She turned

away, feeling miserable and hurt, but Brenda passed her on the way to the cloakroom and cheered her a little.

"Jolly good running anyway, Patsy."

Patsy smiled faintly. She knew Brenda was just trying to be kind, but it was nice of her.

Lessons were no difficulty. Gran had seen to it that she was well up to standard, and although she taught Patsy herself she had kept abreast with modern methods and made things interesting.

No, it was the gym and games that worried her. And somehow, now, it seemed to her that it would have been better had it been the other way round, for at Morlake everyone seemed to think an awful lot of the very things she found so strange.

Sometimes Miss Johns was quite sarcastic.

"It won't *hurt* you, Patsy," she would say, when Patsy ran up the springboard towards the vaulting horse, only to stop dead when she reached it. Patsy felt she could almost hear Gran saying: "Be careful, dear. No, I shouldn't climb that fence. You might fall. Besides, it isn't very ladylike."

Although Patsy began now to lose a little of her shyness and mix with the other girls she never felt really one of them and one day, as she came into the cloakroom, she overheard Maisie Baird say:

"Oh, she's all right . . . but she's such a frightened Isaac!"

Patsy went hot all over. They were talking about her, of course—and it was true. She *was* frightened of all the dreadful things she was supposed to do, but she had thought she was getting just a little better. She turned and crept away, hoping that no one had seen her.

She wished she could go home and tell Gran about it—tell her that school was a dreadful place where all dangerous and unladylike things were approved of.

Perhaps Gran would take her away. She would miss Brenda and Joan and . . . oh, all of them really . . . but at least they wouldn't be able to laugh at her any more.

Well, she would see Gran in three weeks now, for she was coming down at half-term. All the parents and friends would be there. There was to be a hockey match in the afternoon between Morlake and St. Catherine's, a neighbouring school—and a play in the evening. She would find an opportunity for a talk with Gran. She would understand, but it wasn't the sort of thing one could explain properly in a letter.

After that decision Patsy felt happier, knowing that she had only to endure for such a little while. Strangely enough, it seemed to help a lot.

“That's better,” said Miss Johns approvingly, as Patsy surprising herself, cleared the horse at one leap.

Patsy looked back in amazement. Why, that time it had seemed quite easy! But later in the lesson she knocked the rope down at only two feet just because she was telling herself all the time that she couldn't, no, she was sure she couldn't do it.

“Have you seen the list on the board of those playing in the match?” asked Joan Hardy excitedly that afternoon.

“No. Is it up?”



The girls gathered round the notice board, chattering.

"Don't push . . . let me see!"

"Brenda, you're down, of course, as centre-forward."

"Maisie and Joan . . . and Barbara. . . ."

" . . . and Joan. Up Morlake!"

"Down Morlake and up St. Catherine's like last year, perhaps," suggested Brenda, laughing.

Patsy craned her head to see the rest of the names.

Of course, she had known that her name wouldn't be down, though last week Miss Johns had seemed so pleased with her run down the side-line that she had cherished a faint hope that she might be a reserve.

As the days sped by Patsy began to wonder if she would tell Gran after all. Certainly her hockey was improving in leaps and bounds, and she had made one or two friends, Brenda and Joan and one or two others.

Then, three days before half-term they were practising handstands on the vaulting horse, in gym. Miss Johns encouraged Patsy to try and she felt she could have done it, only, as she ran up, she seemed to hear Gran say: "Be careful." She gave a half-hearted jump, twisted a little out of Miss Johns' grasp and fell, giving herself a nasty bump on her forehead.

Anointed with arnica, she sat miserably on a form for the rest of the lesson. It didn't really hurt, but she realised how silly she must have looked, and she was almost sure she had heard Maisie whisper: "Poor old frightened Isaac."

Well, she had two more days.

Half-term Saturday was brisk and fine—a lovely day with a hint of spring in the air.

At two o'clock parents and friends began to arrive, to be claimed and rejoiced over by the girls.

Patsy stood at the back of the hall, watching for Gran.

There she was, the darling, with her pretty white hair freshly waved, and wearing a new and jaunty little black hat that Patsy hadn't seen before. A rush of love swept over Patsy. Darling Gran, she must have known that Patsy would like her to look her very nicest. She darted forward eagerly.

“Gran, darling!” she cried, giving her a quick hug, “How lovely to see you!”

“And you too, childie. How I've missed you! But you look well and happy and that's all that matters.”

Patsy's bright face clouded a little, then cleared again. This wasn't the time to tell Gran and she *was* happy, for the moment, at least. It was fun this afternoon with all the talk and laughter and the feeling of showing off one's own school. . . . Yes, it was her own school now, whatever happened later, she added quickly to herself. She shook herself out of her thoughts.

“This is Brenda, Gran.” Patsy moved towards a laughing group. “And Joan . . . and Maisie . . . and Olive. . . .”

Gran was greeting the others and their parents, and saying just the right things. Patsy could see, even in that moment, that they all liked her. She began to feel really one of them as they all chatted together.

Presently the visitors and the girls settled down to watch the hockey match. The sun was shining and it was warm enough to be pleasant. Even Gran refused the headmistress's open invitation to anyone who wished to sit in the library while the match was on.

“Look, Gran. That's Penny Garth, our best centre-forward, and there's Brenda . . . and Jane Daren, over that side. She's right wing—that's where I usually play.”

Gran adjusted her glasses and frowned a little.

“Is that a hard ball, dear? Rather rough and dangerous, isn't it?”

“Oh, no, Gran, it's a lovely game really . . .” began Patsy, then bit her lip, remembering.

The game went on.



Morlake put up a good fight, but they didn't seem to be able to get the ball as much as they wished, and at half-time the score was three—love in St. Catherine's favour.

"Oh, dear," said Gran, quite concerned, "That's not at all good, is it? Do you know, dear, I quite enjoyed watching—very exciting. Though, of course . . ." she hesitated and didn't finish her sentence.

But Patsy was hardly listening.

"I wonder what all the fuss is about . . .?" she wondered thoughtfully.

A little group of girls was gathered around Miss Johns and they seemed to be talking very earnestly. Suddenly Miss Johns began to walk over to where Patsy stood with Gran.

"Jane doesn't feel very well, Patsy, and I don't think she should go on playing. She had a bilious attack yesterday, you know, and I was doubtful about her. . . . You must take her place."

"Me?" cried Patsy wildly and ungrammatically.

"Yes, you," said Miss Johns smiling. "You've been playing right wing a lot and you can really run. The girl playing against Jane is very swift. Barbara is good, but she's a little slow for her, I'm afraid."

The whistle blew and in a daze Patsy walked on to the field. Gran's voice floated behind her: "Be careful, dear." Patsy was seized with panic. It was awful. She'd do something silly, she knew . . . and the whole school was watching.

The game began again. The ball came towards Patsy. She and her opponent sprinted towards it, but Patsy was there first. She made a dart at it but other girls were running towards her and, in imagination she seemed to feel their sticks crashing at her. She stepped aside, feeling dizzy, and the ball leaped to the other end of the field. Another goal for St. Catherine's!

Patsy heard a groan go round the field and she imagined the girls saying to their parents:

"That's old frightened Isaac. Can't think why they put *her* in!"

She pressed her hand to her eyes and shook her head. The feeling of

dizziness suddenly went as determination and excitement possessed her. As the ball came towards her again she almost leaped at it and dashed up the field with the ball well in control. For once she forgot the others coming towards her. She dodged them as if they were not there and swept the ball towards the goal. Another girl gave it a slight flick and it sped between the posts, leaving the goal-keeper staring.

"Goal!" shouted Morlake with one voice.

As Patsy went back to her place she caught sight of Gran, with perky hat slightly awry, waving her umbrella and shouting with the rest.

After that Patsy forgot everything but the game. The Morlake team, encouraged by a goal, renewed their efforts, but it seemed that at best the game would result in a draw as, three minutes before time the score became four-all.

Three minutes to go!

Patsy stared at the ball fiercely, willing it to come her way, but the other players had begun to realise what Patsy had done for the game and, as Brenda's stick hooked the ball she pushed it over in Patsy's direction.

Patsy and her opponent leaped upon it at one moment. Stick clashed on stick—Patsy almost had it, lost it—then got it again. At last it was under her control. Panting, she sprinted up the field, ignoring all rules for passing and when still yards from the goal took a chance. With one sure stroke she smote the ball towards the goal. Taken by surprise the goal-keeper made a wild dive at it, missed it, and the ball sailed unchallenged through the posts, just as the whistle blew!

"Hoo-ray! Morlake wins!"

The girls shouted and cheered, then, realised the discomfiture of the visiting team and cheered them too.

Patsy was banged on the back and shaken by the hand and generally congratulated all round as the heroine of the hour. Even Miss Johns said quietly:

“I knew you could do it, Patsy, if only you could forget yourself. You’ll never look back now.”

Patsy glowed proudly. When she joined Gran to take her in to tea, she was straightening her hat and wiping her eyes.

“Well played, my dear. I was proud of you. What a thrilling game indeed. I wish I could have played it myself.”

“Oh, Gran,” laughed Patsy, “you told me it was rough and dangerous.”

“Just my way, dear, just my way. We old folks can’t help worrying about the young. You see, we were brought up so differently in our young days and we forget times have changed. But when I look around at the young people here I’m bound to admit you’re more fortunate.”

Patsy threw all thoughts of leaving Morlake to the winds. In a quiet corner she gave Gran a hug and a little shake.

“Darling, you’re never, never to say ‘Be careful’ again.”
Gran’s eyes twinkled.

“All right,” she agreed. “If you will be . . . I won’t!”

SALLY AND THE SHOW

by Bertha Leonard

"SALLY, old girl, you're going to have a job to keep your end up!" Sally Simpson turned from the horse she was grooming to look at her friend.

"Oh, in what way? And where?" she inquired, although neither tone nor expression showed any concern. As a matter of fact, Sally wasn't feeling any; she was mildly curious, that was all.

Madge Chesser laughed. "It's so impossible to upset your self-confidence," she said, "that I'm never afraid to tell you things."

Sally accepted this tribute with a smile as she patted Chief's glossy neck. "Tell on, then," was her serene bidding.

Madge obeyed. "There's a new girl coming to the 'High' and she can ride like a—well—like *you* can."

Sally's laugh rang out. "You *are* being afraid to tell me things, after all," she challenged. "Be honest, now. What you really meant to say was that she's a *better* rider than I am."

But Madge shook her head. "You're wrong, then," she protested. "I meant just what I said. People call you a champion rider, and that's just what I've heard about her or something very like it."

Her friend nodded interestedly; there was no jealousy in Sally.

"She sounds great," was her comment. "But why need I worry about keeping my end up? The riding is nothing to do with school."

"She's entering for the Show competitions," Madge said with meaning.

Sally's eyebrows went up. "Oh, now I get you," she cried. "In that case I *shall* have to look to my laurels. Chief!" she patted her favourite affectionately, "You and I are going to have rivals, old boy! *There's* spice for you!"

Madge heaved a sigh of relief. "I knew you'd take it like that, Sally; you're such a sport," she said warmly. "Personally, though, I hate this girl barging in just when you specially want to shine at winning events."

"Still, that's not to say I shan't win them," Sally's tone was dry but her smile was sunny.

"No," agreed Madge, adding however: "but you'll be up against more just when you particularly wanted to feel absolutely sure of success. I *wish* your father and mother wouldn't be so tiresome."

The wish, impatiently spoken, drew another laugh from Sally.

"Poor dears! Tiresome! just because they want me on the farm. *I'm* the one *they* think tiresome, for wanting to be a riding instructor instead."

"Well, and why shouldn't you, when you're absolutely cut out for it?" Madge demanded, sturdily.

"That's what I think, of course," the other admitted, "and as there are Jack and Winnie to come on for the farming—well—I'm going to fight for my own choice as regards myself. By the way, what's the name of this riding paragon you've mentioned?"

"Sheila Druce! Her father has bought old Mr. Bennett's veterinary practice."

Sally suspended operations on Chief for a minute while she digested this information, then she gave a long whistle and remarked:

"Then what she doesn't know about handling animals won't be worth knowing. Well, that goes for me, too, being a farmer's daughter, so the odds look about even. Hurrah for some excitement!"

Sheila Druce's entry into Carminster High School at half-term signified excitement for all the other pupils besides the effervescent Sally. Strangely enough, the new-comer was as red-headed and every bit as strong-charactered as Sally herself, so a real battle for supremacy was expected as soon as the new girl had found her feet. Both girls were quick-tempered, but neither was bad-tempered. Sparks could fly one minute, but laughter would hold the reins in the next. Rivalry between

the pair, however, was inevitable and it quickly infected the whole school.

And the whole school was going to the Show; there the 'High's' quite famed young rider hoped to make such a 'splash' that her parents would no longer have the heart to argue against her ambition.

The majority of Sally's schoolfellows were keen on her getting her way, but there did exist a number of girls who, although they liked Sally well enough, simply weren't interested in her coveted career. They were the ones who said they couldn't see the sense of all the fuss or being a riding instructor. Anybody could ride a horse by sticking on its back long enough. So these were the girls who rather hailed a change from what they sometimes called the school's 'Sally-itis' and they welcomed Sheila accordingly. This meant that 'sides' were created automatically, with a 'star' horsewoman as the centrepiece of each and all the good humour in the world couldn't alter the fact that they were rivals.

Nevertheless, there was a distinct friendliness between the two, doubtless born of their mutual admiration of each other's prowess in the saddle. Nobody was surprised, therefore, that they went riding together.

On the day before the Show, Sheila had telephoned to the farm asking if Sally could meet her next morning for an early gallop on the downs.

"'Short and sweet': you know," she had said; "we mustn't tire the gees, but it's as well for them to let off steam just a little before the great event; they'll be all the more manageable."

Sally had agreed and as school holidays had just begun and the Show day was considered her own, she was able to fall in with the suggestion.

So in the morning, as arranged, the two most aspiring contestants of the day jogged in spirited converse towards the dewy turf of the downs behind the farm.

"It's a good job Show day has come at last," Sheila said after a few preliminaries. "There would soon have been civil war at school."

Sally's laugh revealed her complete understanding of this announcement.

"I know," she replied. "You and I are a proper bone of contention to some of the silly owls. It'll be interesting to see what happens when I've carried off all the honours. Hope your champions won't mob me."

"When *you've* carried off all the honours, eh?" retorted Sheila. "Of all the cool bits; to my face, too! What if *I* carry them off? What then, you bag of conceit?"

The 'bag of conceit' chuckled elfishly and two pairs of greeny-blue eyes met in swift challenge. Wordy lunges were never long absent when the two girls were together, but the attraction each had for the other always prevented any actual rift between them; bound by a common interest, the idea of a real quarrel never seemed to enter their heads.

So now, although mischief was the prevailing expression on Sally's face, while Sheila's wore a look of lofty disdain, they continued side by side in perfect amity, and once on the downs, Sheila presently pointed her riding crop at a distant tree clump.

"Race you!" she cried.

The horses were given their heads then and a great gallop followed, their hooves drumming madly as they ran neck and neck, each animal as conscious of its own excellence in wind and limb as it was of the skilled seat of its riders.

But the most sure-footed steeds and sure-seated riders sometimes have mishaps, and the race was suddenly brought to an untimely finish through Sheila's horse, Kim, putting his foot into a hole. Luckily for him he recovered himself without falling on his knees, but the sudden jerk sent Sheila flying out of the saddle clean over his head, and on to her own.

Sally reined in Chief as quickly as she could, then sent him careering back; Kim was all right, at any rate, was her swift thought, but what of Sheila? However, she soon felt reassured, for even as she rode up, Sheila struggled to her feet, looking a trifle dazed but grinning cheerfully all the same.

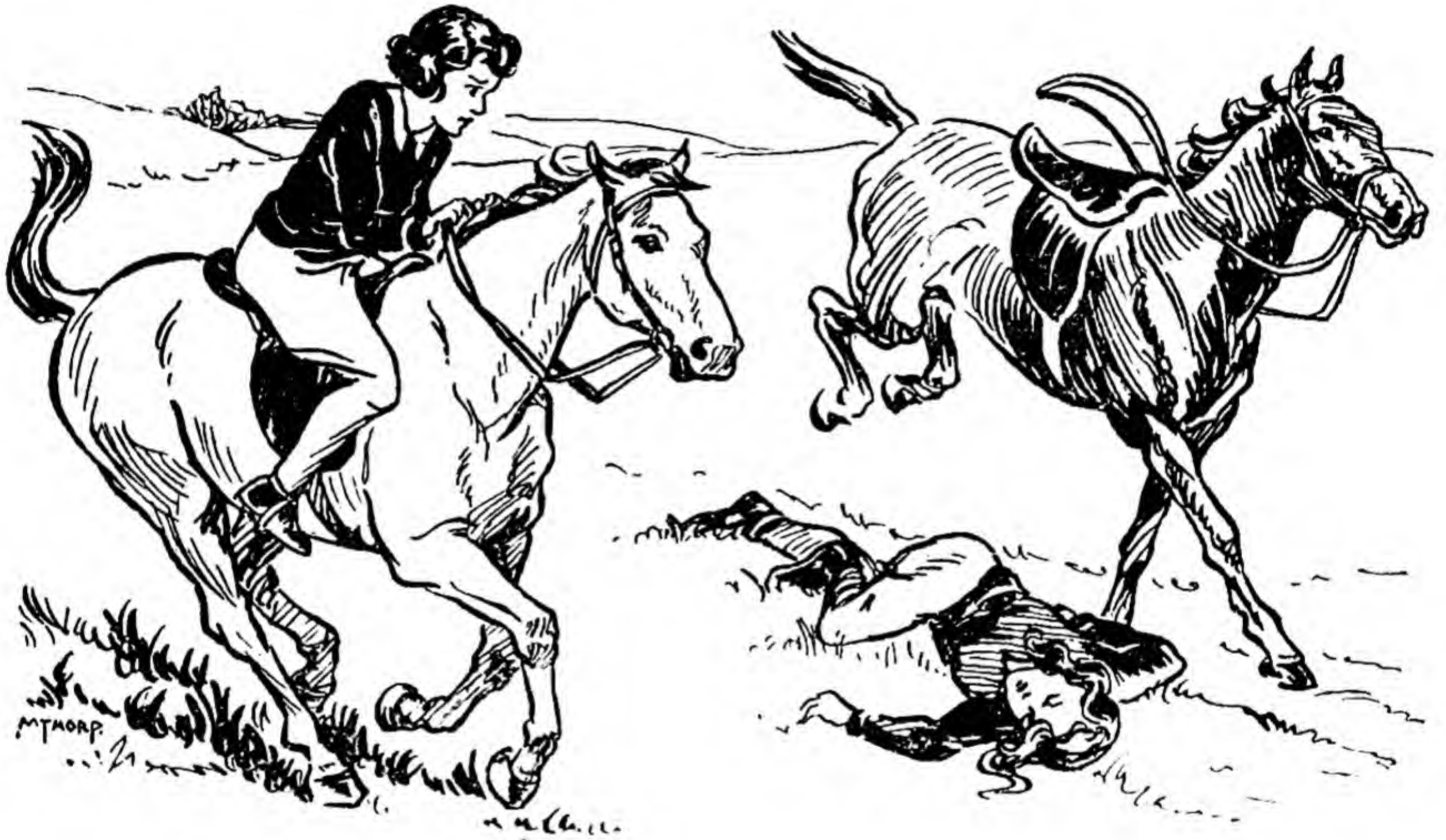
"Hurt?" inquired Sally sympathetically, dismounting to pat the

sleek Kim, who, like the well-trained animal he was, stood still awaiting his mistress after giving himself a shake.

After moving her arms and twisting her neck, Sheila reported:

"Don't think so. Tough as pinwire, you know; we folk always are—luckily. Kim's knees all right? He didn't go right down, I think."

"No, *you* had the worst of it," Sally said, as together they satisfied



themselves regarding the horse. "Rotten, taking a toss like that to-day of all days."

But Sheila was already re-mounting. "Never mind. Might have been worse. I'll be all right; let's just jog for a bit."

And by the end of the ride, which went quite enjoyable again after that, the slight accident had been forgotten by both girls in the excitement of coming events.

They did not meet for any conversation at the opening of the Show or for some time afterwards; as a matter of fact, each was caught into a

vortex of admirers from which it was difficult to escape, until the time came for the racing and jumping handicaps.

But the fact that Sally's crowd was the bigger of the two gave her special chum the greatest satisfaction.

"I say, Sally, if it came to a fight, I'm sure *we* should win," she said with a chuckle during the waiting period.

"Fight? Who? Why?" Sally's eyes were merry. "No fisticuffs for me at the moment, thanks. I can't afford a black eye with Sheila for a rival."

"No! bother Sheila, I say!" Madge exploded petulantly. "But you don't seem to mind her a scrap; in fact, you're quite surprisingly pally with her."

"Well, why not? She hasn't done me any harm; as yet, anyway."

But the light-hearted words and smile had no effect on Madge's frown. She nodded grimly towards the group of girls around the 'High's' new-comer.

"Sheila may be straight enough," she conceded, "but I don't think much of her supporters; they keep looking daggers at you, the wretches!"

"Let 'em!" was Sally's complacent comment, to which she added after a careless glance towards the rival camp, "so long as they've no daggers to stick into me, why worry? You're taking the whole affair too seriously, old thing. Let's be merry and bright. Come on! there's the first race starting."

It was an animated and excited crowd with which the High School girls presently mingled, their main interest, naturally, being in the exploits of the 'High' competitors. But it was when their two champions began to appear in event after event that enthusiasm reached its highest pitch. For some time, however, honours remained fairly even; neither Sheila-ites nor Sally-ites were able to crow over each other, so applause was distributed with praiseworthy impartiality.

But presently uneasy looks showed on the faces of Sheila's adherents; their cheers became less spontaneous, too, just as those of Sally's friends grew more vociferous to match their ever brightening expressions. For

Sheila was giving to those who watched so closely, an impression of flagging, while Sally, evidently on the watch for anything in the races, however trivial, in her own favour, was taking full advantages with a freshness that made the supporters of her rival grind their teeth in rage.

"D'you know," one of them remarked to a companion presently in Madge's hearing, "I believe Sheila is deliberately keeping Kim from his best now; she knows what store Sally is setting on doing more brilliantly than anyone else and—well—you know what I mean, don't you?"

If a pin had been suddenly thrust into Madge she could not have felt more startled and irritated. Her face flushing with indignation, she looked around first to see who else was likely to have overheard this heresy, then she turned on the girl who had uttered it.

"That's a beastly thing to say, Jean Bowles," she muttered fiercely. "You know as well as I do that Sheila wouldn't descend to what you're hinting."

The other girl looked down her nose at Madge.

"I know nothing of the kind," she snapped; "none of us do, for that matter, Sheila being a new-comer. Why, it may even be a put up job between her and Sally; they're on quite friendly terms; and by the way, that's put *your* nose out of joint, Madge Chesser!"

In a perfect ferment of rage, Madge glared ferociously at the taunter, feeling ready to slap her face. But fortunately, she received a sharp nudge at that moment from one of her friends, bringing her to her senses and reminding her that one of the most exciting events was about to begin.

It was to be one of the most rigorous tests of jumping powers, and both Sally and Sheila had been full of it for days beforehand, each being eager to show off her horse's capabilities.

"Here they come!" were the words hissed in Madge's ear that brought her gaze round again to the course, and after that, nothing mattered but watching Sally.

Yes, watching Sally! And after the first jump wondering if she had suddenly gone mad!

It was while Chief and Kim were getting into their stride again after the jump that the shock came for Sally, blotting out everything except the desperate need of her rival.

"Sally!" her ears caught plainly the panicky cry beside her. "Help me! I can't hold Kim in! My head—is queer——"

It did not matter to Sally in the seconds that followed, that competitors who had been behind went thundering past; all that mattered was the vital need of pressing Chief up near enough to *his* rival for her to grasp Kim's limp rein. Then, after skilfully slackening the speed of both horses and getting both sets of reins in one hand, she edged Chief closer still, and leaning sideways, threw an arm about the swaying Sheila just in time.

"It was a masterpiece of skill, riding and control, Sally my dear. I shudder to think what might have happened to Sheila but for you and I can never be grateful enough to you," Mr. Druce presently told the heroine of the field.

For perhaps the first time in her life Sally was feeling a trifle overwhelmed; not because of staring crowds—she was used to those, but by the tribute that started a cheer going the rounds—a cheer that was taken up not only by her own cronies, but by the girls who had favoured Sheila most.

"I'd no idea the fall this morning had upset her, Mr. Druce," was all that Sally could think of to say.

"No, neither had she, it seems, till the jumping started," he replied. "Delayed concussion, the doctor says, but she'll be all right after a few days quiet. I say, Mr. Simpson," he added, turning swiftly to Sally's father, "I'm thinking of starting a riding school a little later on and I'd like your girl along with mine as riding instructor. What about it?"

And Mr. Simpson's answer got bandied about till it reached the ears of a certain girl who nodded amiably at Madge.

"I take back all I said and I apologise," she muttered. "Sally didn't win the last race, but she's won her way all the same. Hurrah!"



A TALE OF TWO FIRES

by Vera Bedford

THE gipsy encampment on the common was a picturesque sight. The caravans were painted in bright colours—red and yellow and green, and these colours were repeated in the gay rags of the gipsies themselves. But on closer inspection the camp was not so inviting. The paint on the caravans was covered with dirty finger-marks, and the gay clothing was shabby and soiled. The horde of children shouting and laughing as they played in the sunshine were happy enough. But their hair was rough and unkempt, their skins coated with grime, and their bare feet unwashed.

Pedro sat on the steps of his home, a clay pipe between his teeth, a once-white panama on the back of his black curls. He watched the children with a smile on his brown face, picking out his own family and gazing at their sturdiness with pride. Then his eyes fell on his eldest daughter, and his smile changed to a frown.

Somehow he never had been able to understand Maria. She wasn't like his other children with their happy-go-lucky ways. There she sat now, a pile of clothes belonging to her little brothers and sisters at her side. She was attempting to mend the great rents in them, sewing busily, and now and again calling to the younger children. Her black silky hair was smoothly brushed and plaited, her carefully-patched clothes looked fresh and gay, the bare feet peeping from under her skirt were clean.

She was certainly growing into a little beauty, thought Pedro, but it was not natural to keep so clean and tidy. There was no time to be always washing yourself. The gipsies led a healthy enough life, and a bit of dirt would hurt no-one. His eyes turned again to his other children, and he suddenly stood up and approached Maria.

She lifted big brown eyes and smiled up at him.

"Hello, Father, are you coming to help me?"

"Help you!" he exclaimed, "No, I think you ought to be doing something better than wasting your time on those things"—He gave the pile of garments a kick as he spoke, then suddenly felt angry with himself. From someone Pedro had inherited other than gipsy blood, and occasionally something cleaner and finer would try to push its way uppermost. He was naturally lazy and dirty, and now it angered him to see his daughter doing something which showed that she too was not wholly a gipsy. In fact the finer strain was predominant in Maria.

He vented his anger on the clothes, suddenly giving them another kick, then he dragged Maria roughly to her feet.

"If you want to work," he said, "you can work for some money for your food. Go to the village with some pegs, and bring back some bread for us. Your brothers and sisters can do without your patches, but they can't do without bread."

Maria turned away with tears in her eyes, and Pedro felt ashamed of himself. But he said no more, plunging his hands deep into the pockets of his ragged trousers, and sauntering off to join Black Pete, who was setting off with his axe to cut wood for the fires.

As Maria picked up the scattered garments, her heart felt heavy. How she hated going from door to door trying to sell things. She always felt so ashamed when people stared at her, then slammed the door with a muttered "Not to-day thank you." But she was forced to do it. She was no longer a child and was expected to help to feed the growing family.

Then she smiled again as she watched her little brothers and sisters tumbling and fighting and shouting. In spite of her attempts to keep them as clean as herself they were soon as grubby as ever. They hated her to try to comb out their thick black curls, and knew that if they yelled loudly enough either Pedro or his wife would come to their aid. Their parents did not comb *their* hair every day, and sympathised with the little ones. So Maria had to content herself with doing as much as she could for them, while Pedro and Jessie laughed lazily at her efforts, or suddenly turned on her angrily as Pedro had just done.

Maria entered the caravan, smoothed her hair in front of the cracked mirror, and put on the shoes which she used only for visits to the towns. Somehow, she could not bear to tread the hard roads with bare feet as the others did. Her skin was tender and easily cut, and when a lady one day gave her an old pair of shoes, she was overjoyed. But they would have to last for a long time, so they were only worn on such occasions as this.

Maria's mother entered at that moment, and laughed at the sight of the shoes.

"And where is my lady going to now?" she asked.

Maria explained, then picked up her basket and set off across the common.

She almost hated her mother when she was in that teasing, sneering mood. Perhaps the older woman was jealous of her daughter's beauty, which was all the more obvious in comparison with her own dirty untidy appearance. Jessie was always ready to tease her, sometimes passing remarks in front of other gipsies, which caused them to roar with laughter, and made Maria miserable and uncomfortable.

I'm too sensitive, she thought as she reached the highway and approached the town. If I just laughed and didn't care, like the others, they'd take no notice of me. But I can't *bear* to be raggy and dirty, and why should they laugh at me if I like to wash and mend my clothes and look clean and tidy?

Maria looked at the houses, and a feeling of jealousy came over her as she noticed the gay little gardens, the fresh curtains at the windows, and a girl of her own age, in trim school uniform, enter a door held open by a rosy-faced, smiling old lady.

Nobody laughs at *them* because they like to look nice, thought the gipsy girl. Oh, how I wish I had been born in a house, and had a kind mother, and went to school with girls like that.

Then she gave her shoulders a shake. What was the good of wishing for the impossible. Her job was to sell pegs, and she'd better hurry or there'd be no dinner left for her if she was late back.

Maria went up the garden path, and tapped at the door through which the schoolgirl had just disappeared. After a moment the old lady opened the door, and seeing the gipsy, was about to refuse her offer of pegs, when she looked again and changed her mind. As Maria walked away, clutching the money, she overheard a voice saying, "——the cleanest I've seen, so I thought she deserved help."

That was some consolation. Her mother had always taught her that the more wretched you looked, the more you'd be pitied, but evidently there were some people who preferred cleanliness. That was a good thing, thought Maria, for she could not bring herself to whine and beg as she'd seen some of the gipsy girls do.

It seemed to be her lucky day, or else the people in this town were more generous, for the pegs were all sold in an hour. Then to the shops, and soon the basket was filled with bread and sugar for the family, tobacco for Pedro, and a length of bright-coloured ribbon for Jessie. Maria hoped that these purchases would please them so much that they would not begrudge her the soap which she had bought for herself.

And so it turned out. The family was sitting round a steaming pot hanging over the fire when Maria joined them, and the little ones cheered at the sight of the crusty new loaves and the sugar. Pedro and Jessie grabbed their gifts happily, and though there was a roar of laughter at the sight of the soap, and a few teasing remarks, there was none of the sneering which caused the girl so much misery.

That afternoon she set off to search the country-side for a pond or stream in which to bathe. Maria always did this whenever the site of the camp was changed. To-day she felt unusually happy as she walked along, feeling the soft grass between her bare toes, and the warmth of the sun on her face. She was making for a wooded slope some distance from the common, but the miles slipped quickly away as she sang happily to herself.

Suddenly she stopped. Above the trees rose a group of chimneys with a spiral of smoke rising into the still air. The wood must be private property after all, part of the parkland of the big house. Maria was about to turn back, but then changed her mind. After all, she would be doing no harm, and this seemed to be the only possible place to look for water.

So Maria went on into the shade of the trees, and was rewarded by the sight of a sparkling pool formed among some rocks in a hollow, and filled by a spring gushing from a cleft in a great rock. From the pool the water overflowed in a tiny waterfall, then gurgled along between the trees and disappeared from view. For a few minutes Maria stood gazing round in delight, then she quickly undressed and plunged into the water.

She gasped as she sat up, then soaped herself all over, and slid again under the surface. Maria never remembered seeing a bath in her life, but she had heard of these luxuries in the houses, and she never missed an opportunity of bathing in the pools provided by Nature. A few minutes later she was sitting on top of the big rock, drying her hair in the sunlight which shone between the trees, her whole being tingling from the effects of the cold water.

A white-haired woman, walking slowly between the trees, came to a sudden halt when she saw the girl. Next moment she closed her eyes and put out her hand, clinging to a tree as if to support herself. Then, with white face and tear-dimmed eyes, she turned away and walked quickly towards the house.

A smooth lawn stretched between the house and trees, and here a little boy was playing, watched by his nurse. She looked up as the woman approached, then put down her knitting and hurried to take her mistress's arm.

"What is it?" she cried, as she supported her to a seat, "you look ill, Madam. Has something upset you?"

Mrs. Grainger shook her head, then sighed.

"I shall be all right in a moment," she replied. "I saw a little gipsy girl in the woods. She reminded me—— Her dark hair and brown eyes——" She broke off, and covered her face with her hands.

"Mummy, Mummy," cried the little boy, looking up from his game, "look, I've built a big house."

Then he jumped up and ran forward, clambering on to the seat, and putting his arms round Mrs. Grainger's neck.

"Don't cry, Mummy," he said. "Nanny, why is Mummy crying?"

Mrs. Grainger looked up and forced a smile.

"Mummy isn't crying," she said, hugging the little form to her, "I'm just tired, Son. You go on with your game while I go in for a rest."

The little boy watched her walk slowly to the house, then turned to his nurse.

"Mummy is often tired, isn't she?" he asked, "and her eyes go all sad. Is she thinking about baby sister again?"

"I expect so," was the reply, but as the nurse took up her knitting again she wondered, as she had often done, that such little reminders still upset her mistress after all these years.

Gerald returned to his bricks with a sigh. He wished he had a jolly laughing mummy all the time. But now and again she would be sad

and quiet, and would not join in his games. Nurse had told him she was thinking of the baby sister who had died, and he mustn't worry her. He wished he had a baby sister now to play with. That *would* be fun. Suddenly he looked up and saw a flash of scarlet between the trees. He ran forward, but could see nothing, and nurse called him back as he was about to enter the wood.

Maria walked quickly back to the encampment. She had been away longer than usual, but the picture she had seen through the trees had held her—the sad-faced, white-haired lady, the merry little boy trying to comfort her, and the beautiful home in the background. She looked up as her little brother Tino ran to meet her, and compared him and Jessie with the other mother and son whom she had been watching. How she envied the people at the big house.

That night Maria could not sleep. It was hot and stifling in the caravan, and also she was haunted by the face of the woman she had seen that afternoon. Somewhere she felt, she had seen her before. She was young in spite of her white hair, and Maria seemed to see her bending over her bed and smiling as she had smiled at the little boy. She tossed about, then decided to go outside for a while and breathe the cool night air.

Creeping quietly out of bed, so as not to disturb the little sisters who shared it, she slipped into some clothes and tiptoed outside. She loved the moonlight summer nights, and often wandered about while the rest of the camp was asleep. To-night she found herself walking in the same direction as she had taken in the afternoon. Soon she could see the dark line of the trees outlined against the sky, then something leapt up—a tongue of flame!

It was followed by a crackling sound, and soon the sky was lit up by a red glow. Heedless of the rough ground beneath her bare feet, Maria ran through the trees until she came out on to the lawn.

She caught her breath at the sight which greeted her. One wing of the house was enveloped in flames, while dark figures ran backwards

and forwards, and the air was filled with cries and shouts. As Maria ran across the grass she saw that some of the servants were running for hose and buckets, while others were just stumbling through the door, still dazed and half-asleep.

Just as she reached them, a sudden cry rang out, "The mistress, and Master Gerald. They haven't come out!"

Without a moment's hesitation the gipsy girl dashed through the door and up the great staircase which confronted her. In her mind was a picture of the mother and her little boy, and her one thought was to help them to safety. Then she heard footsteps behind her, and glancing over her shoulder she saw that two men were following her. One of them ran past, calling to her as he did so to go back, but she took no notice. Along a corridor they ran, and now thick clouds of smoke were billowing towards them, and it became difficult to breathe.

The first man glanced about him, then ran into a room and reappeared carrying a jug of water. Dipping his handkerchief into this, he tied it round his mouth and ran on. The second man followed suit, and Maria stood hesitating, then drew back as a tongue of flame burst through a door opposite.

Suddenly the frightened cry of a child rang out, and Maria hesitated no longer. She carried no handkerchief, so she ripped a piece off her skirt, soaked it in the water, and tied it round her face. Then, breathing more easily, she ran towards the sound she had heard. At first she could see nothing, then, as a sudden gust blew the smoke to one side, she made out the shape of two beds. One of the men was just stooping to lift the still form of his mistress, who had collapsed just inside the room. The other was picking up the frightened child from his little bed, across which lay the nurse.

Maria saw at a glance that there was no time to lose. Flames were creeping up the curtains and bed-clothes, and the heat was stifling. Running forward, she snatched the boy from the man's arms, while he turned his attention to the nurse. Already nearly overcome by heat

and smoke, the three staggered out on to the landing with their burdens. Maria could hardly see by now, and she stumbled blindly forward. As she reached the head of the staircase, there was a crash behind her as part of the roof collapsed, scattering showers of sparks and burning fragments around. A piece of burning wood struck Maria between the shoulders, and she fell forward.

Maria opened her eyes to find herself lying in a little room that made her stare round in astonishment. Her eyes shone with pleasure at the sight of the pretty curtains and wallpaper, and the dainty furniture. She tried to sit up to gain a better view of her surroundings, but fell back with a little cry as a burning pain shot up her back.

At the sound, a woman who had been sitting by the window came forward, and supporting Maria's head, offered her a cooling drink. Then Maria lay back with a sigh, and looked up gratefully at the woman, whom she recognised as the nurse of the little boy.

"Is he all right?" she whispered.

The nurse nodded, then said, "Now keep quiet until the doctor comes. Everybody is safe and the fire was put out before it reached this wing of the house. Mrs. Grainger and Master Gerald are resting, but I am stronger, so I soon recovered. Thanks to you and Brown and MacGregor, the master will find his family safe and sound when he arrives."

A knock at the door interrupted her, and a maid showed in an elderly, grey-haired doctor.

"Ah, so this is my other patient," he said as he approached the bed, "young Gerald has been asking to see his rescuer——" He stopped, and Maria felt the colour rising in her face as he gazed at her keenly. After a moment he went on—"What is your name? I don't remember you, and I think I know everybody who lives around here."

Maria told him of the gipsy encampment on the common, and for the first time wondered what the gipsies would think about her disappearance.

"Don't worry, we'll send a message and let them know you're safe," said the doctor in answer to her question. "Now let me look at that back."

As he stooped to examine her, Maria was surprised to hear a suppressed exclamation, and looking up into the doctor's face, she saw the same pensive, puzzled expression there as when he first saw her. She felt rather frightened until the doctor seeing that she was watching him, smiled down at her.

"Oh, we'll soon have you well again," he said as he dressed the burn, then as he went out Maria heard him say to the nurse:

"As soon as Mr. Grainger returns, ring me up. I would like to speak to him straight away."



The next few days passed like a dream for Maria. Pedro came to see her, but seemed to be so impressed by his surroundings, that he hardly dared to speak. Mr. Grainger came in too, and seemed overcome when he saw her. He kissed her tenderly as he thanked her for saving his little boy, and Maria thought how handsome he was with his sleek black hair and brown eyes, and his beautifully tailored clothes, so unlike Pedro's. He came in again the next day when the doctor was there, and gave a little cry when he saw her back.

"But it isn't so bad, really it isn't," said Maria, thinking it must be a terrible sight that had such an effect. "It hardly hurts at all to-day."

Mr. Grainger did not answer, but walked quickly from the room as if he could not trust himself to stay with her. She did not see him again until two days later.

It was the most wonderful day in Maria's life. First of all nurse brought her some clothes, beautiful new clothes such as she had never had in her life before. When she was dressed and looked at herself in the mirror she could hardly believe it was Maria the gipsy girl who looked back at her. Then nurse helped her downstairs and out on to the lawn, where a couch had been put for her.

Maria lay back with a sigh of joy, gazing round at the blue sky and trees, and listening to the song of the birds. The house looked very different from when she had first seen it, for one side was almost completely destroyed, the skeleton of the walls standing black and grim against the sky. Maria turned her eyes from it to the beauty of the gardens.

There was a sudden shout, and Gerald ran across the grass to her. He had already paid her one visit, but had been too shy to say much, so now Maria was surprised when he put his arms round her and hugged her.

"Mummy says you're my new sister," he cried. "Oh, isn't it lovely to have a sister all of my own to play with me. You will play with me when your back is better, won't you?"

"Of course I will," replied Maria, "But I'm not a real sister, you know."

Then she stopped, and her eyes clouded over at the thought of returning to the squalor of gipsy life after enjoying so much luxury. Gerald broke the silence with another shout.

"Here's Daddy," he cried. "Daddy, Maria says she's not a real sister. Tell her she is."

"Yes, you're *my* little girl now," said Mr. Grainger, stooping to kiss her. "How would you like to live here always?"

"B—but, I'm a gipsy," she gasped, "you won't want me. And what about my father and mother?"

"Maria," said Mr. Grainger in a gentle voice as he sat on the edge of her couch, "have you ever thought of how different you are from the other gipsies? Pedro told me he was often puzzled by your ways. Pedro is not your father, my dear."

The girl looked up, a frightened expression in her brown eyes. What was he trying to tell her? At the sight of her bewilderment, Mr. Grainger took her hand and smiled reassuringly.

"Listen, Maria, I'm going to tell you a story, a true story, and I want you to listen carefully. Nearly thirteen years ago, a lady was staying with her baby girl and nurse at a farm in the country, when one night a fire broke out. In spite of all attempt at rescue work, only the mother was saved. It was thought rather strange for a time that nothing was found of the baby amongst the ruins after the fire had been put out, though the body of the nurse was recovered. It was some time later that the parents heard of this, for the mother had been dangerously ill with the shock, and her husband had not left her bedside. Nobody had wanted to add to their troubles, and after careful investigation it was decided that all evidence had been destroyed."

The narrator paused as if remembering some incident of the past, a sad expression in his brown eyes. Then, with a start Maria guessed. *He* was the father of the poor little baby. She squeezed his hand sympathetically, and he went on.

"Some years afterwards another baby was born, a little boy, and the mother was happier. Then came another fire." He looked towards the house, and again Maria felt frightened and puzzled. Why was he telling *her* all this? But he had called her his little girl, and Gerald insisted that she was his sister. Surely—suddenly she went white, but the man did not notice as he continued.

"This time the nurse and the little boy were rescued as well as the mother, and the heroine of the fire was a little gipsy girl. God must

have guided her to the house that night. The old family doctor came to see her, and after his first visit he guessed the truth, but he asked me to see you too, to make sure. Yes, I am the father, the father of the little girl who was lost in one fire and brought back by another."

For a while he could not go on, but held the girl closely, while Maria's head seemed to be whirling with what she had heard. Was it possible that *she* was the baby who had been lost? But how——

"Yes, it's a strange story," went on the gentle voice. "My baby girl had a peculiar birthmark on her left shoulder, which the doctor recognised as soon as he saw it when he examined you, and you will remember I saw it and knew it too. Besides, you are very much like me you know, and he noticed that first. Of course, we needed more proof, so we sent for the gipsies who claimed to be your parents. Pedro knew nothing, for he had been abroad for a year at that time, leaving his wife and baby daughter behind. At first Jessie denied everything, then this morning she gave in, when I had promised not to take any action against her—— Ah, here is the doctor to see you. Good afternoon, Doctor Mitchell, I'm just telling your little patient the story of her life. Perhaps you'd like to tell her what Jessie told us. I'm not used to talking so much to young ladies. But maybe my little daughter is tired?"

"Oh, no. *Please* tell me everything," cried Maria. "It is all so wonderful. I think I must be dreaming."

"Oh, you're quite wide awake, young lady," retorted the doctor. "I remember when you were a baby, you *always* seemed to be wide awake when you should have been sleeping, and gave your nurse some trouble, I can assure you. I expect you woke her up with your yells the night the farm was burnt down. Well, this is Jessie's story, which has cleared up the mystery of how you came to be living with the gipsies as one of them. Her baby girl died soon after Pedro had gone away, and she never told him. Then one night she was sleeping in a barn when she was awakened by the sound of men shouting, and the crackling of a fire. She ran out and saw the blazing farm-house. Then suddenly a bedroom

window was opened, and a nurse holding a baby looked out. She screamed to the gipsy woman to help her, and Jessie held out her wide skirt and told her to throw the baby down. At the very moment that the baby fell the floor of the room must have collapsed, for the nurse disappeared from view. Jessie quietened the baby, then, she tells us, she felt that this child had been sent to her to fill the place of her own. Nobody had seen what had happened, for the men were fighting the fire at the other side of the house. So she stole away into the darkness, and brought you up as her own child. Yes, you've had ~~some~~ strange experiences, Miss Grainger."

Maria's brown eyes opened wide at this unfamiliar form of address, then she hid her face in her father's coat and cried from sheer happiness.

"Come, we mustn't have tears," he laughed. "Here's your little brother coming to cheer you up. And your mother wants to see you too. This second shock was almost too much for her at first, but now that she knows her little girl has come back, she is getting well quickly. She *has* seen you once you know."

"Where?" asked Maria curiously, lifting her head, and smiling at Gerald, who shyly offered her his grubby little handkerchief.

"By the pool in the woods," was the reply. "You know, my dear, if it had not been for your love of keeping clean and tidy, we should perhaps never have found you. You'll have to teach this little fellow to be the same—he's the despair of his nurse. Just *look* at that handkerchief! And now we'll go to your mother. I'm sure she won't wait a minute longer to claim her little gipsy daughter."

And so, supported by her new-found father, with Gerald clinging to her hand, Maria went back to her own mother.

ELSIE MARLEY

by Arthur Williams

Elsie Marley has grown so fine,
She won't get up to feed the swine;
But stays in bed till half-past nine,
Lazy Elsie Marley.

FARMER MARLEY and his wife kept a small farm by the Cotswold Hills. Each morning the farmer would waken his wife, call the farm boy, John, and go to milk the cows. His wife would feed the pigs, and then gather all the eggs she could find.

John would brush down the old brown mare, Betsy, and get her ready to take Mrs. Marley to market, or else he would lead her into the fields to work there.

While Mrs. Marley was getting breakfast ready she would say: "I mustn't keep my darling Elsie waiting for her breakfast, and it's gone eight o'clock."

Sometimes Farmer Marley would reply:

"I wish Elsie would get up and help, you have so much to do, Mother."

But Mrs. Marley would say:

"Now, Tom Marley, you know I don't want Elsie to work on the farm, or in the house, I want her to be a lady."

"Have it your own way," the farmer would say, "but I don't hold with it at all."

For years they had saved every penny and sent their daughter to a good school.

Mrs. Marley said that Elsie must grow up a lady, and as the farmer dearly loved his daughter, he agreed.

"Sit up, Elsie, here's your breakfast," Mrs. Marley said one morning, as she set down the neatly laid tray beside Elsie's bed.

"Oh, bother," Elsie cried, sitting up and beginning to eat her breakfast. "I hope you've got some hot water for me," she said. "I hate having to wash in cold. I don't know why we can't have hot water in the taps like they have at school. And Mother, must I have the smell of the farm-yard brought into my bedroom on your clothes?"

Mrs. Marley flushed crimson. "What can I do dear?" she said, apologetically. "We're so busy just now. We could do with a little extra help, but your father can't afford it."

Still, Elsie went on grumbling. And one day she completely astonished her father by complaining about his quaint country speech and sayings.

"I can't think what be a-happening to Elsie," he said, after tea that day. "She be getting too fine for the likes of us. What with her staying a-bed in the mornings, and grumbling about every little thing in the house, I don't know what things be a-coming to. I know it isn't very grand. But it's our own, and I owes no man a penny. And now she's a-grumbling because we don't talk grand. Now don't you be crying, Mother," he said lovingly, as a tear streaked down his wife's honest face. "You fuss yourself far too much for her, she be growing into a little madam."

So the summer days faded to mellow autumn. The winter was cold and hard, and just as Mrs. Marley was thinking that spring was well on its way, the farmer fell ill and had to go to hospital.

The doctors saved his life, but they said he would not be very strong for a long time.

Between her visits to the hospital Mrs. Marley struggled on at the farm. And, of course, her daughter was no help; she was a lady and much too fine to do any work.

So, in the end, with lots of bills to pay and very little money to pay them, the horse had to be sold and the boy, John, sent home.

When Mrs. Marley's sister, whose husband kept a big farm some distance away, heard what had happened, she hurried over.

"Why didn't you tell us," she said, a little annoyed at not knowing. Mrs. Marley explained that they did not like to tell—not even relatives.

"Then let me take Elsie back to stay with us," her sister said, "it will be a great help to you."

"Oh, yes, Mother, do let me go," Elsie said, thinking of the lovely farmhouse, with the swing in the orchard, and her uncle's fine motor car.

So struggling to hold back her tears, Mrs. Marley consented.

For a few days Elsie thoroughly enjoyed herself. She sat beneath the apple trees in the sunny orchard reading her favourite books; she went for rides when her uncle was going to town; and did all kinds of things except write to her mother, or send a message to her father.

Then, one night as she was going to bed, her Aunt Jane said:

"Elsie, you must get up earlier in the morning. And don't forget," she called, as Elsie went flouncing up the bedroom stairs, "breakfast is at eight."

Inside her bedroom Elsie banged the hairbrush into her hair and said spitefully:

"Fancy asking me to get up at eight, I never get up till half-past nine."

She woke in the morning with the bright sunlight flooding the room. She felt hungry and wondered what time it was. The busy little clock on the painted chest of drawers pointed to half-past nine.

She sat up and yawned, stretched herself like a cat, and slipped lazily out of bed.

When she reached the kitchen, there was no signs of anyone about. The breakfast had been cleared from the table. As she was searching in the pantry, her aunt came into the room.

"Good-morning, Elsie, have you slept well?" she asked; then before the girl could reply she glanced at the clock and added: "but I can see you have."

"May I have some breakfast?" Elsie asked, timidly.

Her aunt looked her straight in the face, and Elsie quailed before the stern eyes.

"Do you remember what I told you last night?" she said.

"Yes, aunt."

"I told you breakfast was at eight," her aunt said.

"But I never do get up before half-past nine," Elsie replied with a touch of defiance.

"Very well," replied her aunt, "then you'll get no breakfast. I'll have no sluggard in my house. Now go to the dairy and help your cousins."

Elsie stood mute with anger and vexation.

"Now run along," said her aunt, "I've no time to waste with disobedient girls, or lazy ones."

"But I couldn't work in the dairy, I've never been used to it," Elsie said.

"Then it's time you began," replied her aunt, not unkindly. "Your cousins both work and enjoy doing it, so there's no reason why you shouldn't. Tell them to give you a glass of milk, and take this scone for your lunch."

Elsie went sulkily to the dairy, but she found her two cousins so cheerful and jolly, that she just had to throw off her ill-humour.

They gave her a job to do, and then laughed at the sorry attempt she made.

"Do it like this," said her cousin Molly, taking the cloth and polishing away at a metal pan. "You are a poor one. Didn't your mother ever show you how?"

"Mother never let me do anything," Elsie said, "she didn't want me to be a dairymaid." As she spoke her lip curled in a faint sneer.

"And what's the matter with being a dairymaid?" inquired cousin Dorothy. "I didn't think you were a silly little thing like that."

Elsie winced at her cousin's words. She tossed her head and flushed with annoyance.

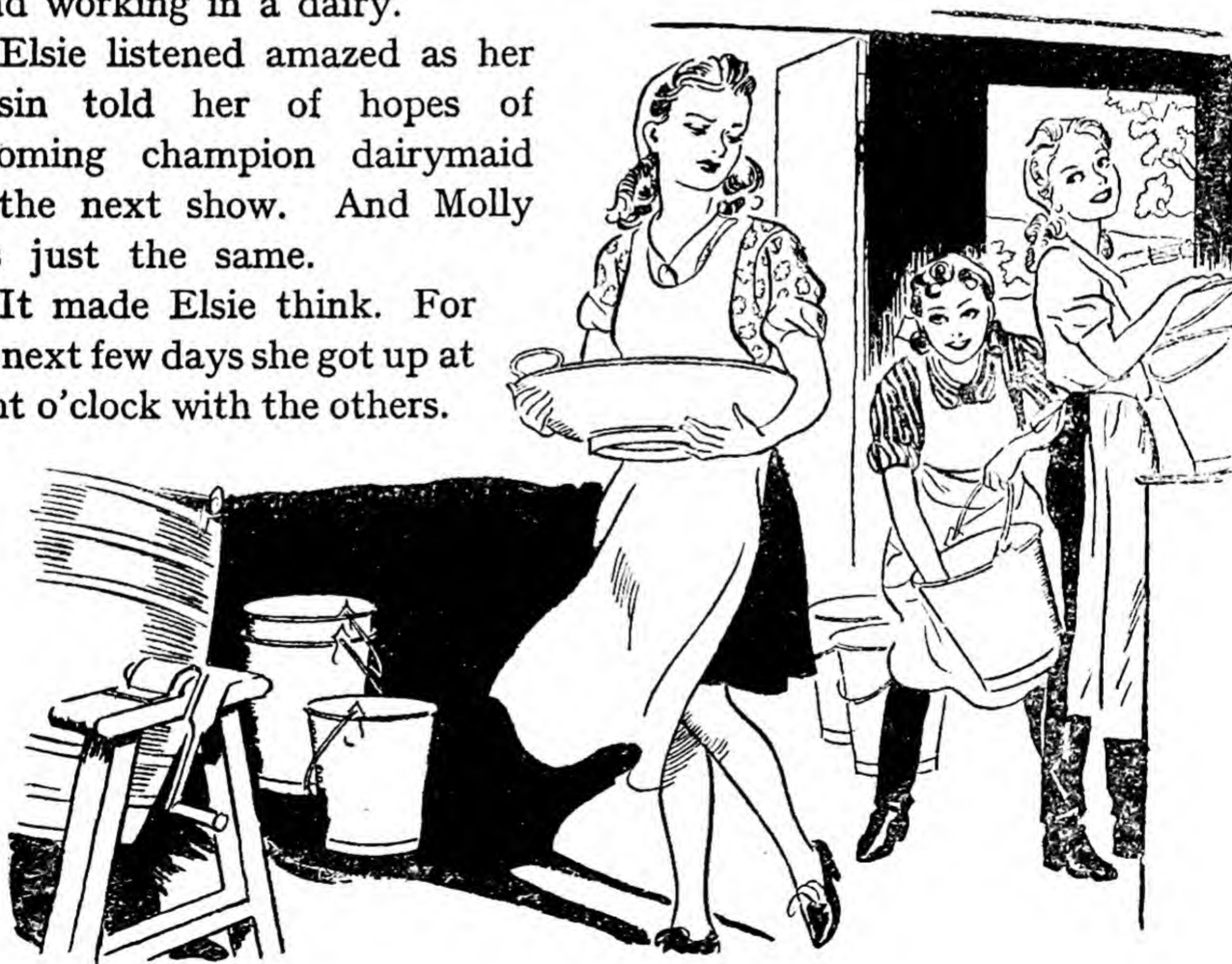
"I'm not a silly little thing," she said hotly.

Her cousin Dorothy, who was a tall, graceful girl of sixteen, looked at her calmly—"Then don't talk as if you were," she said, and went diligently on with her work.

Cousin Dorothy's rebuke made her feel very angry. But Dorothy had a charm that drew Elsie towards her as surely as the flowers draw the bees. Just to hear Dorothy's musical voice, and see the proud way she carried herself, anyone would know *she* was a lady. Still, *she* didn't mind working in a dairy.

Elsie listened amazed as her cousin told her of hopes of becoming champion dairymaid at the next show. And Molly was just the same.

It made Elsie think. For the next few days she got up at eight o'clock with the others.



Her cousins nudged one another and smiled but Elsie found working in the dairy made her very tired. Her arms ached with carrying the great flat bowls of milk, and her fingers grew sore washing and cleaning up after making butter.

So one morning instead of getting up at eight, she again stayed in bed till half-past nine.

No one called her. And when she went downstairs no one was about.

She looked round but could find nothing for breakfast.

Hungry and ill-tempered she tramped across to the dairy where her cousins were already busy.

"Hello, here's our little lie-a-bed," cried Cousin Dorothy, gaily, giving her a smile. "Have you had your sleep out?"

Cousin Molly laughed, but Elsie looked the more sour.

"I wish you could see your face," Molly said, "you wouldn't be a bit pleased."

Elsie scowled all the harder.

"Have you had any breakfast?" Dorothy asked.

"No, I haven't," grumbled Elsie. "Auntie is out, and the pantry door is locked." She stood first on one foot and then on the other, looking quite miserable and unhappy.

At last Dorothy said: "Come and wash these bowls while I go and find you something to eat. You can help yourself to milk."

Elsie needed no second bidding. She washed the bowls until they shone like silver, and when her cousin returned with a large pasty, she was waiting for her.

"This is all I can find," Dorothy said. "You will have to make it do till Mother comes home."

At dinner time as they crossed to the house, Cousin Molly slipped an arm round her shoulders, and said:

"Why do you do things that annoy Mother? We could have such fun if you would only try and please her."

Elsie remained silent. She tossed her head in a I-don't-care manner, but as she took her place at the table she did not feel so brave. She sat with her eyes downcast, almost glued to her plate.

"What is the matter, Elsie," said her uncle, "don't you feel well?"

Elsie mumbled something that could not be heard. Her aunt said: "I don't think she can be, she didn't get up till half-past nine."

Molly and Dorothy glanced hastily across the table at their cousin. She was red to the roots of her hair.

"Mother is too bad," whispered Molly to her sister, as they ate their pudding.

"No, she is not," Dorothy replied. "Elsie needs curing of her lazy habits, and that is Mother's way of doing it."

When dinner was over and the farmer had gone out to the stackyard, his wife said:

"Dorothy, I want you and Molly to go to the village and buy me some wool. Elsie can stay behind, I have something for her to do."

Elsie's heart fluttered like a captive bird's. Now I'm in for it, she thought. She wished she hadn't stayed in bed so late that morning.

When her cousins had gone, she went fearful, and nearly tearful, to the sitting-room where her aunt was busy with her accounts.

"Do you want me, Aunt?" she asked, meekly.

Her aunt looked up sharply. "Yes," she said, "there's something I want you to do.

"Get out some writing paper. I want you to write two letters."

"Two letters," Elsie said, wonderingly.

"Yes! One to your mother, and one to your father. It's time you wrote to them and asked how they were, and stopped being so selfish. Your father is laying ill, and your mother works hard all day long—for you. And you never send them a kind word. I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself."

Elsie stood bewildered. She had never thought of writing to her parents, and yet she had never *really* wished to be unkind.

"Now, come along," said her aunt, "sit down here, and let me see you begin."

Elsie seated herself at the table, took paper and pen, then surprised her aunt by bursting into tears.

For a time her aunt let her cry, then said kindly:

"Now dry those tears, and let me see you write a nice letter."

"I never do write letters," Elsie sobbed, "and I've never meant to be unkind."

"Well," said her aunt, gently, "I'm glad to hear you say that. But you have been, especially to your mother and father."

That afternoon Elsie wrote the first two letters she had ever written. They were not very fine ones, but when they were posted she felt much happier.

When Farmer Marley saw his letter the next morning, it made him suddenly feel a lot better.

Mrs. Marley, too, was happily surprised. She read hers many times, and then answered it right away.

As Elsie was going to bed that night, her aunt said: "Breakfast at eight, Elsie."

And Elsie's trembling voice replied: "Thank you, Aunt, I'll remember." True to her word, she did.

That afternoon her uncle took them all to the hospital to see her father.

"Well, this is a lovely surprise," Farmer Marley said, as he kissed all the girls, and shook hands with his brother-in-law.

"Seeing you again does me more good than the doctor's medicine."

They stayed till tea-time, then had to say good-bye.

"I do think uncle is a dear," Dorothy said, when they were on their way home. "He says the quaintest things. I love to hear him."

"So do I," exclaimed Molly, "and I'm glad he'll soon be going home." Elsie smiled at them, and there and then made a secret vow.

After tea she said to her aunt: "Please may I use your writing things, I want to write to mother and say I'm going home. There must be something I can do to help."

Her aunt was delighted. "Why, certainly you may, dear," she replied. "And give our love to her."

So Elsie went back to their small farm. She got up early each morning and helped her mother; and she never grumbled again.

Soon her father came home from the hospital, and as the weeks went by he got quite well and strong again.

When Elsie next saw her cousins she said to Dorothy: "One day I'm going to be champion dairymaid. I'll have the grandest dairy in all this countryside."

Dorothy laughed good-naturedly and said: "You'll have to work hard, Elsie. It took me a long time to win that prize, and I won't be easily beaten."

But Elsie meant to do it.

THE CYCLING SUMMER

by Eva Chadwick

IN the front garden of the Corner Cottage, Pine Grove, Shirley Stevens was transplanting rock-plants. She was not, however, so much absorbed in the work as to be unaware that Elaine Banks and Madge Sinclair were coming up the Grove on their cycles. Without looking up, she caught the gleam of sunshine on brand-new, silver-plated handlebars and gliding wheels. By the time the cyclists had drawn level with the gate of her home, however, Shirley had turned her back to the roadway and had started off towards the back of the house, carrying a bucket full of weeds. The cyclists slowed down, calling:

"Hi, Shirley!" But Shirley affected not to hear them, and continued her way. They waited a few moments, but the gardener did not come back.

In the potting-shed behind the house, she had closed the door firmly, and had seated herself at the bench, still making a show of being busy with rock-plants. That pretence did not last long, however. She was soon staring absently through the window, leaving the frail plants to wilt and fade on the wooden bench. Her thoughts were with the two



cyclists who by this time, no doubt, were bowling breezily along the quiet roads beyond Fernmoor, in the cool of the summer evening.

"They don't care about me any more," she thought unhappily. "Ever since they got those bikes they have been going off together without a single thought of me. They don't care if I'm lonely or miserable; they just haven't time to bother, and I'm jolly glad I got a chance to show them how much I care."

Thus she excused her conduct to herself, but the two girls riding side by side along the narrow road out of the village, and thinking of the incident, could find no such excuse for her.

"She heard us, of course," remarked Elaine presently, "but she just wouldn't turn round."

"Of course she heard us," Madge agreed, "and I must say I don't know what's come over Shirley lately."

"Oh, *I* know," Elaine asserted, "it's the bikes. It's because she hasn't got one and can't join us in our rides. I was afraid it would be like this."

"And we've been friends such a long time," Madge sighed regretfully.

They both rode on in silence for a time, and then Elaine went on, "I suppose it does seem that we have all the luck, but we can't help it, can we?"

"Not a bit," agreed Madge. "When our folks promised to buy us each a cycle if we won our scholarships to Broadoaks High, I confess I didn't really believe they would."

Elaine grinned.

"Well, I don't really suppose that they ever expected us to win, or I guess they wouldn't have made such rash promises. Shirley had the same chance. I can't think why she couldn't have done what we did. She's not a dud!"

"No," said Madge thoughtfully, "but these unexplainable things do happen in exams; and now that her folks have to pay all her school fees I suppose she can't really expect them to cough up the cash for a bike as well."

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"I guess not, and that puts the stopper on all our lovely plans for a cycling summer. We could have had a marvellous time together."

"A cycling summer," Madge sang out with a sudden burst of high spirits. "We could have had a cycling summer! Why couldn't that idiot Shirley have won her scholarship," and she pedalled furiously for a few yards and then shot forward, sailing effortlessly along, with the wind lifting her hair and singing in her ears.

"I hate leaving her," Elaine confessed when she caught up to Madge again, "but I just can't resist the thrill of riding. Can you?"

"I can't," Madge admitted, "and besides, what would be the use of our having our lovely new bikes at all if we weren't going to use them. No, the only thing we can do to make up to Shirley, is to lend her one of them occasionally."

"If she'll let us," Elaine said. "She certainly isn't running after us at present."

"No," agreed Madge, and off she went again on another joyous spurt, quite unable to restrain any longer her exuberant spirits.

"Hi, look out!" Elaine sang out suddenly from behind, and Madge applying both brakes jerked herself to a rather frightened halt. There was no need for Elaine to point out the danger, however, she had seen it.

From the grass verge of the roadway she saw with blank astonishment a pair of feet protruding. Rather small feet they were, clad in nice brown shoes and white ankle-socks. As the two girls made their headlong appearance the feet hurriedly drew themselves up out of harm's way. Madge, however, felt that she had been inconsiderately dealt with, and she had something to say about the matter.

"Must you sprawl all over the road," she began scathingly, addressing the back of a person who lay face downwards on the grassy bank. She did not get any further than that though, because the person suddenly turned towards her a very distressing face. It was dirty to begin with; and it was tear-stained; to say nothing of a series of ugly scratches running down one cheek.

"Oh! I say," she exclaimed, "have you had a spill?"

Elaine, quick-eyed as usual, had by this time spotted the cycle, which lay in a perilous position a little further on. Picking it up out of the roadway she wheeled it to safety, observing that it was a lovely bike, brand new, like their own. But the girl on the bank showed no interest in it; she didn't appear to care whether it was damaged or not.

In response to Madge's question she nodded mutely, and began vainly to try and repair the damage to her face with an inadequate hanky.

"Hold on a minute," advised Madge, suddenly becoming practical, "we'll tidy you up if you'll wait a minute. Lend me your hanky, Elaine," she ordered. "There's a stream on the other side of the hedge; I'm going through to wet a couple of hankies."

She was back in a minute, and with a touch quite soothing, and an air quite authoritative, she was soon bathing the poor bleeding face of the stranger.

"There!" she said presently. "You look tons better already. Don't cry any more or you'll undo all my beautiful work," and rather surprisingly the patient didn't cry any more.

"Now here's a nice dry hanky," offered Madge. "Guides always carry a supply of clean ones you know—just pat your face a little, and it'll look almost better. Here's a comb, too. You'll feel as fresh as a daisy if you'll just comb your hair now."

"Thank you," said the girl, and whilst she tugged at the tangles in her curly brown hair, Elaine drew Madge's attention to a hat that was lying on the bank. It was a Broadoaks school hat. They exchanged glances of mild astonishment, and waited until the girl had put the finishing touches to her much improved appearance.

"What made you have a spill?" Madge asked at last, unable to restrain her curiosity.

The girl looked at them now with greater composure, and now that she was cleaned up and presentable both Madge and Elaine thought they recognised her a little.

"Wait a minute," Elaine put in, just as she was beginning her explanation. "Aren't you the new girl in our Form?"

"Yes," admitted the girl. "I recognised you at once, but I didn't expect you'd have noticed me. I only started at Broadoaks last week."

"'Course we'd noticed you. Your name's Mary Foye, isn't it?"

"Yes, and I've come to live with my aunt at Primrose Bank down the lane there."

"Have you," exclaimed Madge. "Then when we are riding this way you can join us, can't you?"

"Oh, no," shuddered Mary, "I can't come rides with you. I can't ride at all!"

"Then what are you doing with that?" demanded the insatiable questioner, looking at the splendid new bicycle.

"Trying to learn to ride it!"

"By yourself?"

"Yes. There was no one to teach me. But, but, really——" and it looked as if there would be more tears here—"I don't want to try any more. I don't want to see the thing again. I—I'm scared to death of it!"

"Then why in the world did you have it?" exclaimed Madge, her face a study in astonishment.

"It's aunty," replied the girl miserably. "She's the soul of kindness and she's determined that I must be treated exactly as she treats her own daughter Betty. So because Betty has a new cycle I had to have one too. She just doesn't realise that I'm different from Betty and shall never love riding as she does. Soon she'll be home from boarding-school, and then aunty expects us to have a marvellous time together, going rides about the countryside. But they'll both be disappointed, because I can't ride and I never shall. I'm terrified to try any more!"

"And I don't wonder you're terrified," Madge told her severely. "It's a wonder you didn't kill yourself trying it out here by yourself, and falling off and lying with your feet in the road waiting to be run over."

You need someone to hold you up and teach you the rules of the road and all sorts of things. Elaine and I will teach you if you like, won't we Elaine?"

"Sure," replied the obliging Elaine, who usually allowed Madge to speak for her.

"No, no," sobbed the girl, "I daren't get on that bike again. I've hurt my face dreadfully!"

Elaine and Madge looked at each other. Patience, they mentally decided, would be necessary in a case like this.

"Well, you certainly don't want to get on it any more to-night," conceded Madge. "But you be here to-morrow night about seven and see if we don't help you to ride like a—a—circus trick rider!"

Mary Foye smiled faintly at the enthusiasm of her new friends, but she gave no definite promise that she would come next evening. When they left her, however, she was certainly looking less like an utter wreck than when they found her.

"Go home and rest now," Madge advised her. "But remember to be here to-morrow evening. Good-bye."

"Poor kid, she's quite lost her nerve," Elaine remarked as they rode away. "Think she'll ever get over it?"

"Oh, sure!" declared Madge. "She's got to. We just can't let her waste a spiffing good bike like that. Besides, there's the cousin Betty to consider. She'll come home from school expecting a pal to share her hols. We've got to do our best for them both."

"Oh, you bet we'll do our best," Elaine said, "but I say, won't Shirley wonder what we're up to!"

CHAPTER II

And Shirley did secretly wonder what they were up to. For a week, though, she pretended a lofty indifference to them when she met them at school, but she haunted the front garden every evening in hopes of

seeing them go by. She wanted to see them go riding by because in her present mood it would have given her a perverse delight to feel neglected and lonely. She wanted to pose to herself as a martyr; to wallow in misery, and then to comfort herself with the reflection that it was entirely the fault of Madge and Elaine.

But the two gave her no such satisfaction. They were never seen riding down Pine Grove in the evenings and their absence, absurdly enough, was more disconcerting than their presence would have been. Puzzling over their non-appearance, Shirley remembered suddenly, one evening, that they seemed to have scraped some sort of acquaintance with a new girl in the form, a quiet sort of a girl whom one didn't much notice. After that she took particular care to watch the day-time doings of her former chums, and so came to the conclusion that Mary Foye had supplanted her. "Perhaps she's got a bike, too," she thought bitterly. "I guess they're off every evening, the three of them, having lovely long rides in the country."

After that she didn't speak to Madge and Elaine any more. She avoided them carefully. She found, however, that this gave her no real satisfaction, because the two never really stopped being pleasant to her. They took her coldness in a sadly resigned sort of way that seemed to suggest patiently, "Ah well—you'll probably get over it."

Then there was the question of the birthday party. The very last day of summer term was Shirley's birthday and ever since she could remember Elaine Banks and Madge Sinclair had been the principal guests at her parties. They had always mattered so much more than anybody else. But now, she just couldn't think what was to happen. She was quite definitely estranged from them, so how on earth could she invite them to her party? Yet there was her mother to be considered.

"If I tell mother that it's all because of their having cycles and me not, she'll be just miserable because she can't afford to buy me one. It'll look as if I'm asking for one, and really I know Mum's got enough to do to pay my school fees. I'll simply have to pretend that I don't

want a party." And so, with only a few more days to go, matters stood like that.

Meanwhile Madge and Elaine had made some progress with the cycling lessons; or perhaps it was Mary who had made the progress. From sheer terror of mounting 'the thing,' as she called it, she had advanced to a quite confident handling of her machine.

For several evenings, guided in turn by her two patient teachers, she had wavered and wobbled about the quiet lane, but under their care she had sustained no further injuries. Later, the two were able to sit on the bank and watch whilst she rode unaccompanied about the lane, but at last they had begun to take rides all together, much further afield. It was whilst they were returning from one of these that Mary made a suggestion.

"I say you two," she said, "You're coming home with me to-night."

They said "What?" quite inelegantly.

"Yes, you are. We're having a celebration supper. Aunty insists."

"Does she?" they asked in some awe, for it had just occurred to them that Primrose Bank was a residence of no mean size and appearance.

"You see," Mary explained, "I had to tell her what you've done for me. She was giving me such undeserved praise for having taught myself to ride, that I had to confess everything. She thinks you've been marvellous."

"All the same," Madge demurred, "We don't want any thanks. We've enjoyed it too and besides you recovered your nerve wonderfully."

"But I couldn't have done without you," Mary insisted.

"And here we are, now. Come along in!"

It didn't take long to accommodate themselves to the style and spaciousness of Primrose Bank. Mary's aunt was, as they already knew, the soul of kindness, and they soon felt as if they had known her for years. Large and blonde with a laugh that seemed to rumble from a long way down, she entertained them generously, and seemed really grateful for their kindness to her niece.

"Now," she said, "thanks to you, Mary and Betty will be ready-made riding-partners. They will enjoy their holidays, and I should like to think that you will join them sometimes."

"Thank you," they both said, and yet they couldn't help exchanging just the faintest glances of uneasiness. Perhaps they both had a vision of Shirley, interminably planting rock-plants to fill her lonely hours.

There was a lot to interest the girls in Mary Foye's home; her aunt, it seemed, was a woman of wide interests. There were fine pictures; there were antiques and curios from many lands; and books, particularly books. They stayed and talked and admired things, and suddenly they noticed that it was beginning to go dark.

"My dears!" exclaimed their hostess, "I ought not to have kept you so long. I am afraid I didn't notice the time. You really must dash home; but you'll come again, won't you?"

It was only when they were actually on the point of leaving that Madge made a somewhat troublesome discovery.

"I have no lamp," she exclaimed. "Oh, dear, I shall be sure to get held up!"

"We'll soon fix that," Mary assured her. "Come into the bicycle shed with me. We have some spares."

Mary's own new lamp, however, as yet contained no battery; neither did the old one which they found on a shelf.

"Ah!" she exclaimed at length, and running to a corner she began to remove layers of sacking. Soon she had brought to light a rather shabby old cycle which was lying there. The lamp was in working order.

"Tug that off the bracket," she ordered, "whilst I hold the bike. It'll be stiff because it's been on simply ages."

"Is it Betty's?" asked Madge.

"Her old one," Mary said casually. "She's outgrown this long ago. You ought to see how tall she is. Aunty's going to send this old thing to the Jumble Sale out of the way."

"Oh!" exclaimed Madge and Elaine both together, with quite electrifying effect. Then they stared at each other with sudden hope.

"Oh, do let's have a look at it," begged Madge. "Why, yes, look Elaine; it's a jolly good frame. It only needs some enamel, a good cleaning and oiling and some new tyres. If we put our funds together we could buy it for Shirley. I say, Mary, do ask your aunt to keep it back from the Jumble Sale!"

"No need to ask," chuckled a deep voice from the doorway. "No need to talk about funds either. You can just call and collect it any time you like; I'll be glad to have it out of the way."

"Oh! really," they stammered. "You are kind."

"Not a bit," returned the lady. "You deserve it."

The ride home that night was heavenly. Dusk was coming hazily over the fields; the air was sweet with the smell of blossom; occasionally an unseen bird called clearly out of the nearby wood. It was all one with the delicious thrill of pleasure inside them. They rode airily, blissfully, homeward by way of Pine Grove, but the rock garden of the corner cottage was deserted.

On the eve of her twelfth birthday, Shirley Stevens found herself faced with the biggest problem of her young life. Her announcement to her mother, some days ago, that she didn't want a party, had been met with astonished unbelief.

"Rubbish," Mrs. Stevens had said, "I never heard of such a thing. Of course you'll have a little party. There'll be Madge and Elaine as usual, and you can bring two other friends from school. Surely you have made one or two new friends at Broadoaks."

Now, at seven-thirty in the evening, the invitations for to-morrow's event were still unissued. She had been wavering for the greater part of the day between the idea of giving all four to the girls whom she knew best in her form, or of selecting only two of her form-mates and slipping

the other two through the letter-boxes at the homes of Madge and Elaine. Perhaps they, in their undoubted good nature, would overlook her past behaviour and come as usual. At least that was how she hoped it would turn out, for the latter course was what she had decided on. She was, in fact, actually on her way to deliver the invitations when the two young ladies in question appeared at her very garden-gate.

They were wheeling between them a very neat and shining bicycle, not new, but obviously of good make. She stared at them and tried not to see the cycle.

"Hello," she said, "I was just coming out to see you!"

They were just the faintest bit surprised.

"Yes," she went on feeling a little better now that she had broken the ice. "Will you come to my party to-morrow?"

They grinned widely. Obviously they too, found the change of front acceptable.

"Rather!" they both said, "And here's your present."

If Madge and Elaine had counted on giving Shirley a surprise, their expectations were fully realised. She was staggered. Her words were hardly intelligible, but her eyes—when once she had mastered the embarrassing dimness that assailed them—became radiantly eloquent. She looked from them to their gift as though she could hardly believe it.

"But—I say," she began, "How——"

"Never mind how," Madge put in characteristically, "It's yours. Do you like it?"

"Oh, like it?" breathed Shirley. "I don't know how I can ever thank you." She was silent a moment, and then she added in a low voice, "and I had been thinking you didn't want me any more."

"We gathered something of the sort," Madge twinkled, "so that'll larn you. Hop on and see if it's your size."

But Shirley still held the invitation cards in her hand. "Here," she said to each one in turn, "here are your invites," and then there were still two left.

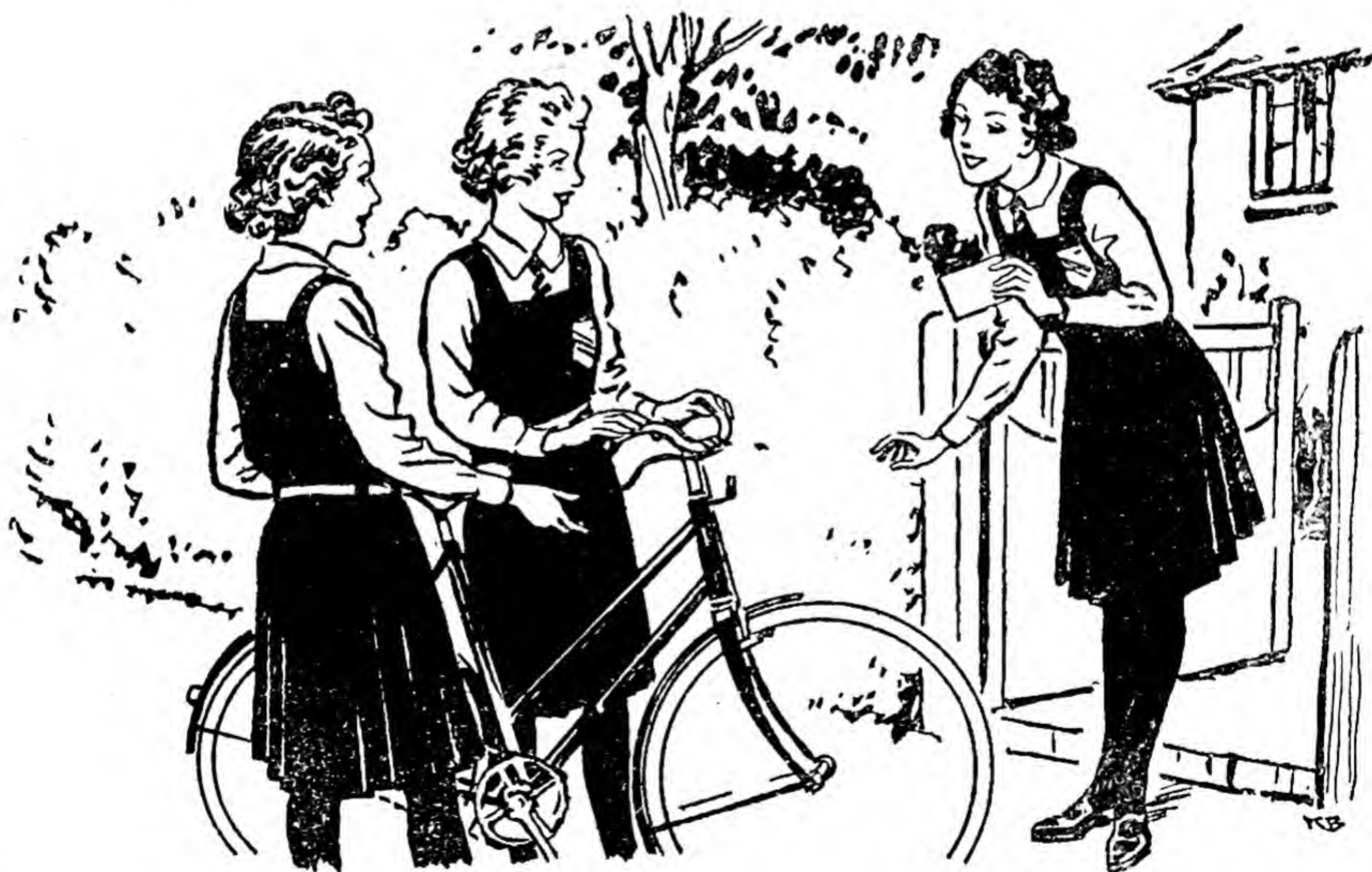
"I don't think I'll want these," she said suddenly. "We three will be enough."

Madge and Elaine exchanged glances, and then Madge, bold as ever, put forth a suggestion.

"Let me have them," she proposed, "I've got a ripping idea. Let's all dash off to Primrose Bank and leave them there for Mary and Betty. Betty will be home from school to-morrow. That will make five of us, all cyclists, a cycling *club* in fact!"

"Oh, good idea," agreed Shirley, "and we can plan a lovely holiday, and have a——"

"Cycling summer!" put in Elaine triumphantly, "just as we planned to have at first."



STAND-IN

by Constance M. White

“*R*OMEO and Juliet!”

“Too sad. No, let’s do *The Merchant of Venice*.”

“Oh, I’m sick of old Shylock—and it’s not a bit pretty. . . .”

“Well, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* then.”

The voices rose and fell, clamorous and demanding; for the Ridley House Dramatic Club was making its most momentous decision of the year. What play should be chosen for the annual performance on Parents’ Day?

“*Must* it be Shakespeare?” asked Rhoda Payton pathetically now, and not for the first time.

“Well, we had a modern play last time.”

Margaret James, head girl of the school and president of the Dramatic Club, stood up and banged on the table for order.

“It’s no good going on like this. We must put it to the vote. Please write your own choice down on a piece of paper. Give out these, Denise, will you? Here, this box will do to collect them in. That’s mine—pass it round, please—and *do* make *sensible* suggestions.”

There was silence for a short while and much chewing of pencils and frowning brows. At last all the papers had been collected and counted. Margaret announced:

“*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* has it. We’ll have to cut it, of course, but it should make a good show.”

There were cheers and groans from the girls, which Margaret broke into with:

“Whoever suggested *Peter Pan*! Just imagine us all flying across *our* stage!”

"I don't see why not," protested Denise Barnes hotly, giving the identity of the suggestion away at once. She was a fat girl with a wide jolly mouth and joined in the laugh against herself when someone suggested wickedly:

"What about Denise for Tinkerbell?"

"Order! Order!" called Margaret, "we must get down to choosing parts."

Carol Morley sat silent, wrapped in her thoughts, her vivid small face reflecting her hopes and fears.

"Please let *me* be Bottom, the weaver. Oh, I *must* be! But, of course, I shan't be!" she whispered to herself, "If only they'd give me something decent for once, I'd show them what I could do!"

But, of course, they all wanted good parts and Margaret and her committee of six were hard put to it to select the fortunate ones.

"Suppose we take the parts one by one," suggested Margaret practically, opening her Shakespeare. "Anyone who feels a special urge to play that part must stand up, and we'll choose from those. We'll take Hermia first—then Helena."

There were thirty members of the Dramatic Club and more than half stood up. It was very difficult, but after much discussion and elimination Doreen Bainton was chosen for Hermia and Janet Duke for Helena.

"We must go strictly by the person's ability to play the part," Margaret said, consolingly. "I'm sorry, all you others, but this doesn't prevent you trying for the other parts, of course. We'll take Lysander next."

Carol endured with impatience while various parts were allotted. For her the great moment came at last when Margaret asked:

"Who wants to play Bottom, the weaver?"

Several girls stood up and Carol, trembling with nervousness, stood up with them. She was never seriously considered, however, for the part, though Sara Lloyd, her own particular friend, was—and finally chosen.

Carol hadn't really expected to be lucky, but, nevertheless felt bitterly disappointed, and looked so crestfallen when she took her seat again that Margaret said kindly:

"We shall want some attendants, of course, and the smaller ones can be fairies. Everyone will do *something*."

Carol flushed uncomfortably. Sara was her friend and she could even be glad for her. How awful if everyone thought she was jealous of those that had parts! And she wasn't really. It was just that she knew she could act—just knew it. Because she was quiet and reserved they all thought she couldn't and didn't give her a chance. One day she'd show them!

"I'm sorry you didn't get a part," said Sara warmly afterwards, slipping a hand in Carol's arm. "I didn't really want to play Bottom much, only I'd stood up for most everything else, without being lucky."

"I'll help you learn your words," offered Carol generously.

Rehearsals came and went. By the end of a month Carol knew everyone's words, but no miracle happened; no one fell out, or said they'd rather not play.

"Only two more weeks!" said Margaret despairingly. "If only you'd all learn your words, at least! We shall never be ready in time."

But, surprisingly, they were.

Faults and stammerings and forgetfulness there were, of course, at the dress rehearsal, but the play had shape at last.

Carol herself coached Sara and heard her lines and gave her hints.

"You know it better than I do. I almost wish you *were* playing my part," groaned Sara, when she forgot her cue once more and was ticked off by Margaret. But Carol knew she didn't really mean it.

The day of the play came at last. Soon after lunch the parents began to arrive, to be pounced upon by delighted offspring and dragged around the school to see everything.

"That's Margaret James, our head," hissed Carol in a stage whisper to her mother as they walked down the corridors, a little ahead of her

father and her small brother, Donald. "She's playing Lysander this afternoon, you know—and there goes Hermia—that tall fair girl in front of us."

"What time is the great event?" laughed Mrs. Morley, "I want a good seat. Your father and I have been wondering if you do any lessons here—your letters are so full of the play!"

"Oh, Mummy, that's just because I'm so keen. . . . The play starts at three-thirty. If you don't mind waiting for a bit I really think you should get a place now," Carol said, guiding her family rapidly through the corridors to the big hall where chairs were crowded as close together as they could be. "Oh, look," she went on, "the first two rows have gone already. Never mind, there's a good place in the centre of the third. Donald can sit on his coat. There—you won't mind me leaving you now, will you? We're not supposed to hang about in here."

Carol sped back along the corridor to the Art Room, which was, on this occasion, being used as a dressing room for the performers. The room was now a confused medley of tumbled clothes, bright costumes and chattering girls.

Getting into the short tunic and long stockings she was to wear as page to Theseus, Carol stifled a sigh. Just an attendant—and no-one but her own family would notice her presence on the stage. She shook off the thought and turned to Sara.

"Let me do you up. You look fine. Now, don't forget. You start: 'You were best to call them generally, man by man——'. You always forget that bit."

"I know," said Sara ruefully. "And I'll be lucky if that's all I forget! I've got stage fright."

"Don't think about it. Just imagine you *are* Bottom," urged Carol earnestly. "Oh, there's the bell. I come on in the first scene. Good luck! I'll be watching for you, and if I can give you a prompt, I will."

Carol sped off to the wings of the stage and took her place behind Theseus and Hippolyta. The curtains rose slowly, and the play began.

Carol was waiting in the wings as Sara came off the stage after the second scene and ran over to her. Sara slipped her hand through Carol's arm and moaned:

"Oh, Carol!"

"You were all right," reassured Carol. "You only stumbled once—just when you were going to make that last speech. No one would have noticed then if you hadn't looked so frightened."

"But I *was* frightened," groaned Sara. "Oh, Carol, I thought of something dreadful . . . when I heard the thunder."

"The thunder won't kill you, silly. It's just nerves."

"No, it's not. It's really something dreadful. This morning, after netball, I was coming across the field just as Miss Raynor came over with the Lower Fourth. She stopped me and asked me to take her watch in and put it in her desk. Oh, Carol!"

"Well?" asked Carol impatiently.

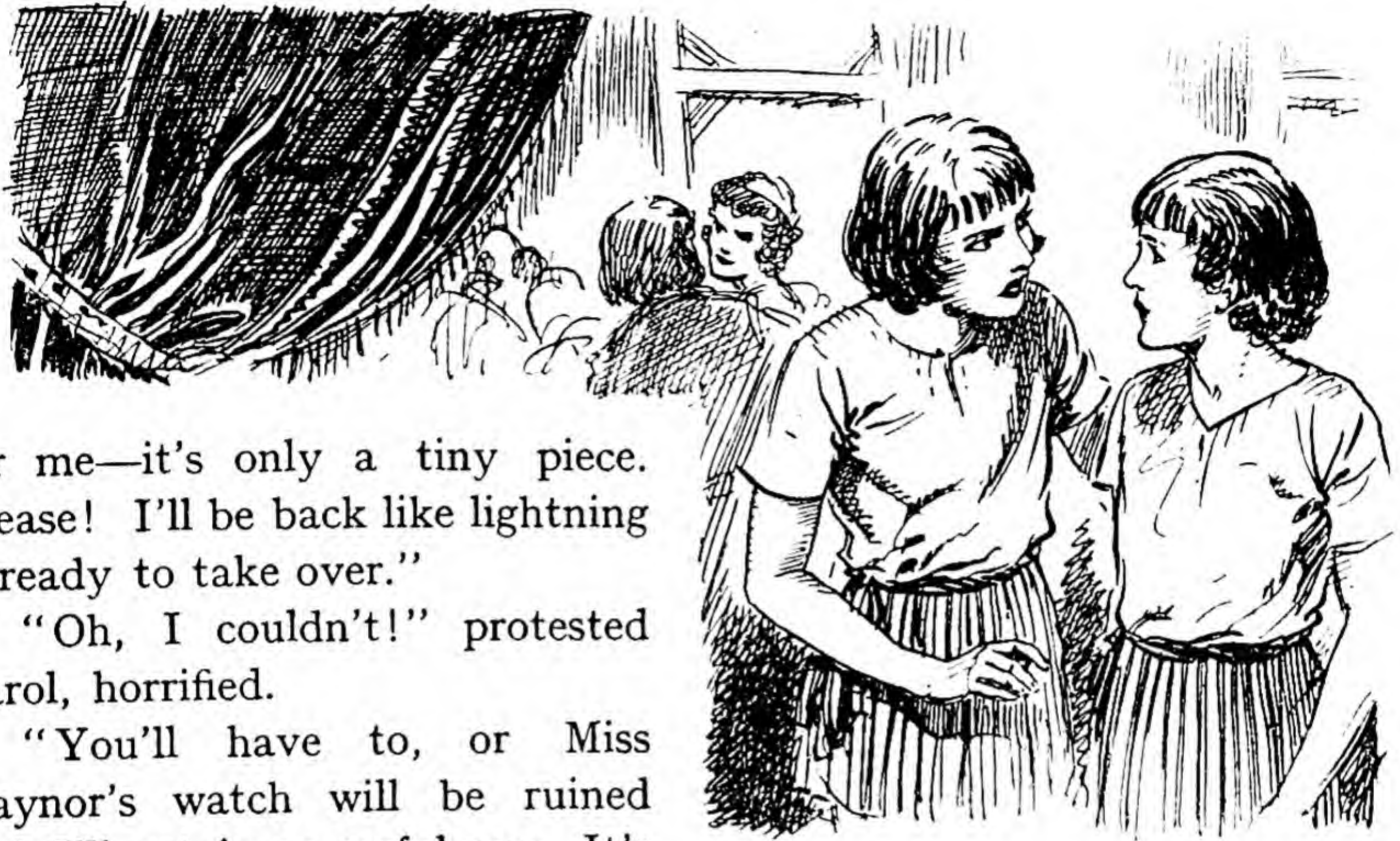
"I didn't want to go in just then, because I thought I'd take a minute or two to look up my part. I sat down in the shrubbery at the bottom of the garden and . . . and I left the watch there! Hark to the thunder . . . and look at those clouds . . .!"

"Oh, dear, that *is* awful," agreed Carol. She thought a minute, then went on: "Don't worry. I'll slip down there and get it. I don't have to go on now, for a long time."

"I don't think you'd find it," groaned Sara, "It might take you ages. You see I put it in a little sort of hollow in one of the trees. I know just where to look, but I can't describe it exactly."

"You'll just have to risk it," said Carol firmly. "Listen, there's Puck saying his last speech in this scene. After that, there's only a short conversation between the two couples and you're on again."

"Oh, Carol, you must help me! Look, I've thought of something. When I, as Bottom, have to go behind the bush I'll dash outside—you change tunics with me and put on the ass's head. Just do that next bit



for me—it's only a tiny piece. Please! I'll be back like lightning—ready to take over."

"Oh, I couldn't!" protested Carol, horrified.

"You'll have to, or Miss Raynor's watch will be ruined and I'll get in an awful row. It's not much to ask. There's my cue. . . . I'll say I've forgotten the ass's head when I come off. You take it into the little room next to the Art Room and . . . be ready."

Carol was left in a panic. She couldn't possibly do it. They'd be found out anyway, and then bad matters would be worse. But Sara was her friend. Perhaps she could think of something else. . . . She ran swiftly along to the little room with the ass's head under her arm, determined to be firm.

But when Sara came flying along the passage she gave her no time to argue. Over Sara's head went her tunic and Carol forced into it. The ass's head was on her shoulders, stopping her protests and with a push Sara sent Carol through the door hissing:

"Quick . . . you're on! Carol, you must . . .!"

Breathless, Carol reached the wings.

Quince was repeating for the third time, in a dazed way:

"Pyramus, enter: your cue is past; it is 'never tire'."

Carol hesitated only a second.

This was not just a play. She *was* Bottom—Bottom bewildered, hurt, when the others stared and left him; flattered and puzzled at Titania's attentions. Carol came off the stage at the end of the little scene, in a dream.

Margaret patted her back as she passed.

"Good, Sara—you were splendid. Hadn't you better get that head off you for a bit now? You'll be so hot."

"Oh, no." Carol put up her hands to hold it on. "Er . . . I'll keep it on. It makes me feel more in the part."

"Well, please yourself, but *I* shouldn't like to wear it long. Funny, even your voice sounds different under that," commented Margaret.

Carol slipped away as soon as she could, back to the little room, hiding there through most of the scene of the quarrels between Demetrius and Hermia and Lysander and Helena. If only Sara would come back! She took off the ass's head for a moment and wiped her hot face. Footsteps were coming along the corridor. She hoped it was Sara, but could not be sure. She popped the head over her own again quickly.

It was Barbara Vince, one of the extras, sent by Margaret to find her.

"Oh, there you are, Sara!" she exclaimed thankfully. "Margaret's in an awful stew because you couldn't be found. You'll be late for your cue again."

She pushed Carol along the corridor with little ceremony. It didn't seem much use protesting. There had been a heavy shower of rain but it had stopped again now. Why couldn't Sara come back?

Once on the stage again, however, Carol forgot her problems. Unconsciously, she gave the part of Bottom, the weaver, the little extra touches of humour she had thought out and been unable to din into Sara. The audience laughed delightedly and told themselves that this girl was good and read her name 'Sara Lloyd' again in the programme.

And now Titania and Bottom were supposed to be sleeping at the side of the stage. Carol had forgotten that part and that she would have

no chance to leave the stage before the ass's head was removed. She lay beside Titania shivering with apprehension, and when Puck pulled off the head she almost screamed—and so did the others! Carol forced herself to lie still.

There was dead silence for a minute. Then, with great presence of mind, Oberon dashed into his words.

“Sound music! Come, my queen. . . .”

Carol lay there, feeling awful. She couldn't think what was best to do. Suddenly she heard Margaret, who lay a little way from her, as Lysander, whisper under her breath:

“I don't know what has happened, but don't let us down now, Carol. You're good, you know. You can do it.”

And with that encouragement Carol got to her feet and reeled off the long speech at the end of that scene, without a mistake.

It was only as the curtain came down and questions were fired at her that she was able to wonder again what *could* have happened to Sara. She could only shake her head obstinately and say that Sara would explain and presently went back on the stage for the last scene.

In spite of her worries Carol just couldn't help enjoying the part where Bottom, as Pyramus, dies, and shouted with such fervour: “Now, die, die, die, die, die!” and stumbled about so comically, trying to find a soft place to fall—and die, that the audience rocked with laughter and were quite sorry when the play ended.

Though all the chief players took a call, no cries were as loud and enthusiastic as those for Bottom.

When, at last, the curtain came down finally, the girls crowded round Carol.

“Where is Sara?” was the question on everyone's lips.

“I wish I knew,” said Carol miserably. Now it was all over she felt horribly guilty. “I took her place because she insisted on it,” she went on, “but *why* . . . well, I think I'd better just tell Margaret and see what she thinks.”

"She was only going to be a few minutes, you see, Margaret," Carol said earnestly, "or I wouldn't have taken it on. Where can she have gone?"

"We'd better find out," said Margaret practically, and instituted a search party.

And down in the little gardening shed crouched Sara, looking rather sorry for herself, with a swollen and bruised ankle twisted under her.

"Wasn't it just my luck to do this?" she moaned. "I was in such a rush I didn't see that tree root. But I've got Miss Raynor's watch safe," she finished triumphantly, producing it from her pocket. "It would have been ruined in that rain! I just managed to drag myself in here but I couldn't get any farther."

Sara's parents and Carol's then had to hear the rights of the tale, of course, and much later on, when all the visitors had gone and Sara was tucked up in bed, Carol was allowed to see her.

"I feel horribly mean . . ." she groaned, "I ought not to have let you do it. You've got this rotten ankle, and I pinched your part . . . and everyone's been so nice to me."

"Don't you mind about that, old thing," said Sara warmly. "I simply didn't give you a chance to refuse. Anyhow, two good things have come of it. Miss Raynor's watch was rescued, and you got a chance to show you can act."

"And it won't be the last, by a long way . . ." put in Margaret, coming quietly into the room and smiling at the two girls. "You've been hiding your lights, Carol. Now we know what you can do we shall find you a credit to the Club."

Carol coloured with pleasure.

"Really?" she asked, her eyes shining.

"Really," said Margaret smiling.

DAY-LIGHT ROBBERY

by Frances Cowen

AS Millicent cycled through the rolling country she felt quite excited at the prospect of seeing her friend, Bertha Harris, again. True, the holidays were nearly over, Millicent with her younger brother and sister had already spent four happy weeks on a farm which lay ten miles inland from the rugged West Coast. In a week's time now they would be returning to their home near London, and, within ten days . . . ten days, it did not seem possible . . . she would be at school again.

And for the whole four weeks she had been within fifteen miles of her friend Bertha's home and not yet visited her.

Of course Bertha was senior prefect at school to Millicent's junior, and her invitation had been casual enough.

When, nearly two months ago, they had been discussing holidays at school and Millicent had said that she was going to stay on a farm in the West country, Bertha had looked up from the racket she had been trying to re-string herself with a:

"West country? That's roughly my part of the world. Where is this farm of yours, Milly?"

"Near a place called Blaire St. Mary's," said Millicent.

"How smashing," cried Bertha. "You won't be fifteen miles from us then. Now, mind you look us up."

Millicent had flushed: "Rather, I will."

"Staverton House, near Staverton is the address. Now don't forget."

Millicent had not forgotten, but she had put off going until now, and would, indeed, not have been on her way now, had she not had a letter from Bertha forwarded on from London, couched in these terms:

"Dear Milly,

"Are you in the West country as you call it, or still in London? If you are at Blaire St. Mary's, do find time to come over and see me. Frankly, I've had a pretty dull time. Dad's here of course, busy on one of his 'little jobs' for the government, and I have had some cousins to stay, but they are boys, and are going in a day or two. Do come over . . . I expect you've got a push bike. As a matter of fact it's going to be jolly lonely in this big place when once the boys have gone, and I'd give something for one of our heart-to-heart talks about school, I suppose, and the new hockey team, which is already giving me a headache.

"If you come, prepare to stay at least one night. Well, Dad's forgotten something or mislaid something and is calling, so I must run.

"I'll be seeing you . . . I hope!

"Yours,

"BERTHA."

She cycled on thoughtfully. She had left the twins at the farm planning a picnic expedition, and started off quite early; another half hour should find her at Staverton, for she had taken trouble to ask the way, and the fifteen miles did not seem so long now that she had negotiated the hills over the moors.

"I ought to have gone over before," she thought, but somehow she had never realised that Bertha might be lonely, on the other hand, she had pictured her in a great house surrounded no doubt, by hordes of friends; this letter had given her quite a different picture of her. Of course she knew that Bertha's mother had died when she was tiny, that her father was a rich man with something to do with the great Bunder works and a well-known scientist in the bargain, but this was all she did know.

In her bicycle basket she had brought pyjamas and toothbrush, a really good book she had enjoyed herself for Bertha, and a parcel of home-made

cakes; Mrs. Widdicome at the farm's speciality. "And I told her I might not be back to-night," she reflected. Yes, it would be fun to see Bertha again and have what she called a heart-to-heart talk with her.

By this time she had left the moors and was cycling along a narrow road which ran between woodland. Staverton House lay somewhere along this road, and she must be very near it now. She cycled on, pleasantly tired, and pleased to think that she would not have to take the fifteen miles back.

The road took a sudden bend, and she was negotiating this, when the roar of engines reached her and she was only just in time to fling herself on to the grassy side, when a high-powered car swept by, going at a good fifty miles an hour. Millicent stood on the verge and watched it go with resentment; it had all but knocked her over, and, as it was, she had fallen off her cycle, and had a bit of a shock.



She stared after it and noted vaguely the Numbers: DVX 021 . . . or was it 821: it had gone past so swiftly that she was not sure.

She made a mental note of the number: "I'd like to report them for speeding," she was thinking. "Another car wouldn't have been able to get out of the way, and there'd have been a most awful crash."

She got on her machine again and cycled on . . . and, as she reached wide, white-painted gates on which was written Staverton House, which told her that she had at last arrived, she thought no more of the incident.

She opened the gates and found herself in a long drive which wound on between the trees through a kind of park, so she got on her cycle again and rode up the drive. It ran for about three hundred yards, then took a wide curve, and she found herself before a long, low, grey-stone house with a wide smooth lawn before it, trim gardens sloping down from a terrace.

She got off her bicycle and began to wish that she had sent Bertha a card, for the place looked quite deserted, and the lines of windows, shining in the sunlight, had a blank look.

No one on the lawn, though it was about tea time on a lovely day, no cheerful bark of dog, no sign of a gardener pottering among the well-kept beds. . . . Propping her cycle against the bushes of the shrubbery at the end of the drive, Millicent carefully took out her belongings and walked sedately up to the front door.

She rang and heard the low buzz of the electric bell and waited. No one came. She rang again after a decent interval, keeping her finger on the bell push for a few moments. Then she stood back, and was watching the waltzing of a blackbird on the deserted lawn, when the door was opened with almost startling abruptness and she was confronted by a short stoutish man with ears which stuck out almost absurdly from his round face.

"What d'you want?" he asked.

Millicent stared. This was not her idea of a butler or man-servant.

"I came to see Miss Morris," she said, "I'm a friend of hers, she asked me."

"Miss Morris," he said, then added, "She's out, been out all day."

With the thought of fifteen miles long ride back, Millicent said: "When will she be back?"

She had scarcely spoken when the man at the door was pushed aside and a tall, thin individual with spectacles and grey hair confronted her: "What's this, Mike?" he asked.

"Young leddy to see Miss Morris. . . ."

The tall man looked at her and smiled: "Oh is that so. Come in a minute, won't you?"

Millicent stepped into a wide flagged hall beautifully furnished with rugs and easy chairs. "Are you Mr. Morris?" she asked pleasantly, "because Bertha must have told you about me. She wrote to ask me over as she was a bit lonely and I was living, well, in this part of the world."

The man smiled. "Indeed. One of her school friends I take it. No, she did not say anything to me. I have been busy you see," he spread out big hands significantly. "But she will be very sorry to miss you, very sorry indeed." He stopped. "As a matter of fact she had a wire this morning and went off in a hurry." He turned to the short man as though for confirmation. "In the deuce of a hurry, wasn't she, Mike?"

The man nodded: "Yes, sir . . . she was."

"And she won't be back to-day?" asked Millicent, her heart sinking.

"No . . . I'm afraid not." The tall man, who was evidently Bertha's father, looked vague, and added: "Can I offer you any refreshments?" On the table by the great hearth stood some bottles and a hunk of bread and cheese. Millicent was hungry, but somehow she did not feel like staying any longer than she could help.

"No thanks," she said, wondering at the rough meal on the table, "I'll ride on. How far is the nearest town?"

Mr. Morris seemed relieved. "Staverton is a matter of four miles down the road." He strode to the door and held out his big flabby hand. "So sorry you have been disappointed, I . . . I'll tell my daughter when she returns."

Millicent said something vague then, a moment later, found herself out in the porch again, the door firmly shut behind her. It was almost as though they had been glad to get rid of her.

She walked slowly to her bicycle, put her bag and parcels back in the basket, and began to ride down the drive. So that was that! She ought to have written to Bertha telling her when she meant to come. Meanwhile she did not much feel like riding fifteen miles back, and she was very hungry; perhaps at Staverton she would be able to get a bus or even a train which would take her part of the way back, certainly she would be able to get a meal.

She reached Staverton and found it a sizable country town, and at once went to a small tea shop, where she ordered tea and buns; taking this light meal, she frowned over her impressions of Staverton House and its occupants. Poor Bertha! She did not envy her living there with that awkward looking man-servant and a father like that, for she hadn't somehow liked what she had seen of Mr. Morris, his hands had been so big and flabby, his eyes behind their spectacles so funny and bright and watchful.

Making up her mind that she would go and cheer her up before the end of the holidays, though this time she would write and make definite arrangements, she finished her tea and got up. She intended to go to the station and see if she could get a train as far as Hederton which would bring her within three miles of her farm. She was going towards the booking office to make enquiries when she saw quite a few people coming through the barrier from a train which had just arrived, she only noted this without much interest when someone precipitated herself from the crowd and dashed up to her.

"Milly, by all that's wonderful! What are you doing here?" Millicent flushed with pleasure, for Bertha Morris stood before her, Bertha clad in a grey suit, a little suitcase in her hand, and looking somehow older than she usually did in school uniform, but the same old Bertha with the grey sparkling eyes and masses of untamed dark curls.

"Why hullo!" she said, then added rather breathlessly: "I've been to your place. . . . You see, I got your letter and decided to come over."

Bertha frowned. "You poor dear, and if I hadn't almost literally walked into Cousin Eunice, you'd have had to go all the way back." She paused. "Let's go and get something to eat, I'm famished. My girl! I've had a practical joke played on me . . .!"

It was no use telling her that she had eaten already, Bertha marshalled her into a bigger and more resplendent tea-shop and began to order tea and welsh rarebit and cakes lavishly.

"And if you can't eat your share I'll finish it," she said, as Milly protested, "I could eat a horse . . . Milly, such a day!" The welsh rarebit was very nice and the buns had not been very satisfying, so Milly ate hers whilst her friend told her her adventures. "This very morning I had decided to have a real quiet day in the garden when a wire arrived from Aunt Ada, you won't know her, but she is my favourite Aunt and a dear. It gave me quite a shock, for it said something like this: 'Seriously ill can you come at once.' Well it did seem funny for her to send for me, for she's got my cousins, who are quite grown up, to see to her, but I showed it to Dad and, though he was a bit puzzled too, I decided to go." She stopped, "It is funny when you come to think of it."

"What?" asked Millicent, putting down her fork.

"Don't ask so many questions, aren't I telling you. Well, to cut a long story short, I got a stopping train, and, at Exeter, got out for a paper and, on the Exeter station, who should I run into but Cousin Eunice, that's Aunt Ada's eldest daughter, who said what was I doing there? Well, I showed her the wire and it was all nonsense. Auntie wasn't ill and anyhow she hadn't sent any wire . . ." Bertha paused for breath.

"So what do you make of that?"

"Someone played a practical joke," said Millicent.

Bertha nodded. "I suppose it must be that, but who would? Anyhow it's a silly kind of joke and unkind, getting me to make a long journey for nothing."

It certainly was a puzzle, the two girls finished their meal discussing

it in all its aspects, without coming to any conclusion about it, then Bertha decided it was time to get home. She had put her own bicycle at a garage and went to collect it, and soon they were both spinning along the road towards Staverton House again.

"Your father will be surprised to see me with you," said Milly.

"Oh, you saw Dad did you? He doesn't usually come down when there's visitors. He's been up to his ears on some important invention, a new gun or something he's doing, and poor company."

"He came and spoke to me after your man Mike came to the door," explained Millicent.

Bertha swerved her front wheel and nearly collided with her friend: "Our man Mike . . . what on earth are you talking about?" she said.

"But you have a man who answered the door, a fattish man with—well large kind of ears that stuck out, and your father called him Mike."

Bertha slowly got off her bicycle. "Look here, Millicent, are you sure you went to my house?"

"It had Staverton House on the gate and there is a long drive and it's a grey stone house with a porch . . ."

"Yes, that's our house . . . but this man Mike, we haven't a man-servant at all, only old Nanny, who is housekeeper, and by the way is out until ten to-day, visiting her friends as it's her day off, and a woman and a girl who come in from Staverton mornings. . . . The only man we employ is the gardener and he's an old man and never in the house . . ."

"But there was this man and he wasn't going to let me in, then your . . . your father came. . . ."

Bertha leaned against her bicycle. "My father," she said, and Milly saw that she had gone rather white. "What was he like?"

"Tall and thin with spectacles and queer eyes somehow . . . oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean queer really . . . and . . ."

She broke off. Bertha had caught her by the arm in a grip that hurt. "My father isn't very tall and certainly not thin, and he wears a beard, a slight kind of beard they call an imperial."

"B-but this man talked of you as his daughter and he was tall and thin and wore spectacles and he was clean-shaven."

"And you mean to say both these men were in our house and you took it they belonged there?"

"Of course. . . ."

Bertha turned her bicycle. "Come on, Milly," she said. "I'm going back."

"Back where?"

"Back to Staverton to the police . . . and I hope to goodness we'll do something with them."

"But . . . what do you mean?"

Bertha was cycling furiously and spoke between her teeth. "That wire getting me out of the way, then you arrive and find two complete strangers in the house. . . . My dear, it's a plot. . . . Dad's plans . . . someone after them. It's all a trick . . ."

"Why do you mean those two men were . . . were criminals?"

"Must be. . . . They must have surprised Dad in his workroom as soon as there was no one in the house. You probably came along just as they were going to get away, and they had to pretend. Now we can only go to the police. . . ."

Again Millicent remembered the rather unpleasant impression she had received when she entered the house. She had not liked the man she had thought was Bertha's father . . . yes, it looked very like a plot . . . a plot for daylight robbery, and, by an odd chance, she had unknowingly caught the thieves red-handed.

Bertha cycled furiously on and they reached the police station hot and dusty. She would say nothing to the constable in the office, but, instead, asked for Inspector Holliday, whom she seemed to know. At last they were taken into an inner office and a big fair man rose from his desk and greeted Bertha with a jolly:

"Hullo, my dear. Don't say you've been exceeding the speed limit on that push bike of yours!"

"No," said Bertha unsmilingly, "It's about Daddy, Inspector, it's serious." She indicated Millicent. "She knows all about it."

He looked serious at once and Bertha told her story quickly, whilst Millicent confirmed what she said.

He listened and took a few notes, then stood up. "Good. It certainly looks suspicious, the wire, then this young lady's story. Your father would be quite alone and he was on a serious job for the government. Now I want you two young ladies to stay here, or at least in the town, whilst I get a few of my men and go to Staverton House."

"I . . . I must come too," said Bertha. "You don't understand, D-Daddy may be hurt." And Millicent saw, suddenly, that she was very near to tears. The Inspector gave her one look then said: "All right. You can follow on in the other car, but my men will have to go in first, understand."

Bertha nodded. She understood.

Millicent will never forget that drive back to Staverton House through the smiling countryside, they were in a second police car, driven by a young constable, the Inspector, with three other men, drove before them in another.

As they whirled up the drive and stopped before the house it looked quiet and peaceful enough. They waited whilst the Inspector rang and knocked, but, when no one came, some of the men got in by a back window and admitted them.

They went inside and Millicent sat by Bertha and saw how tensely she held herself, her hands clasped together.

It was not long before the Inspector came out and crossed to their car at once. He smiled at Bertha. "All right, my dear. We've found your father. He was bound and gagged and in his work room, but only suffering from a knock on the head he must have received when he was surprised."

Bertha nodded. "I'll go to him," she said, and scrambled out of the car and into the house.

As Millicent prepared to follow her, she turned to the Inspector. "Did they get away with . . . what they had come for?"

He nodded frowning. "I think so, though we shall not know until Mr. Morris recovers consciousness and tells us, but his work room had been searched and the safe opened. You must have butted in just when they had almost finished the job."

"I can describe the two," said Millicent.

"Good . . . Come in the house and I'll get it down."

She was following him across the drive when she added: "And there was the car. I wonder had it anything to do with it all."

"What car?" he almost barked.

And she described the car which had all but knocked her down and might well have been coming from the house. He took the number and nodded. "May have dropped the men there then rushed to get off the scene quickly to return for them again. Thanks young lady."

Feeling that after all she might have helped, Millicent went into the house.

She stayed that night and the following day. Mr. Morris, a very pleasant gentleman, though he did wear a little grey imperial and was as different as could have been from the man she had first taken for



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him, recovered very soon from the handling he had received. But the plan which he had been working on and just then completed, was missing. The gang, who evidently had planned carefully, even to finding out the address of Bertha's aunt so that they could decoy her away, were, the Inspector surmised, an international gang working for money. They would be able to sell the plans for a huge sum to some other country. Still, with the description given by Millicent of two of them together with her mention of the car, it would, he hoped, lead to their arrest.

And happily enough it did. The car was traced to Exeter and later, three men, including the two principals who had entered Staverton House and surprised Mr. Morris, were arrested, the plans still on them.

"And really it's all due to you," said Bertha, when the news came through, "If you hadn't noticed the car number, we'd have not been able to trace them. Thank goodness, you came along that day, Milly."

And Milly felt very glad that she had.

As it was, she spent the rest of her holidays with Bertha, where her sister and brother joined her, and they learned to love Staverton House, which, at least to Millicent, had seemed so sinister, and had many a gay game of tennis on its wide courts.

And Millicent will never regret her sudden decision to accept Bertha's invitation and "look her up" that hot day in August.

*This is a very good and
interesting book*

